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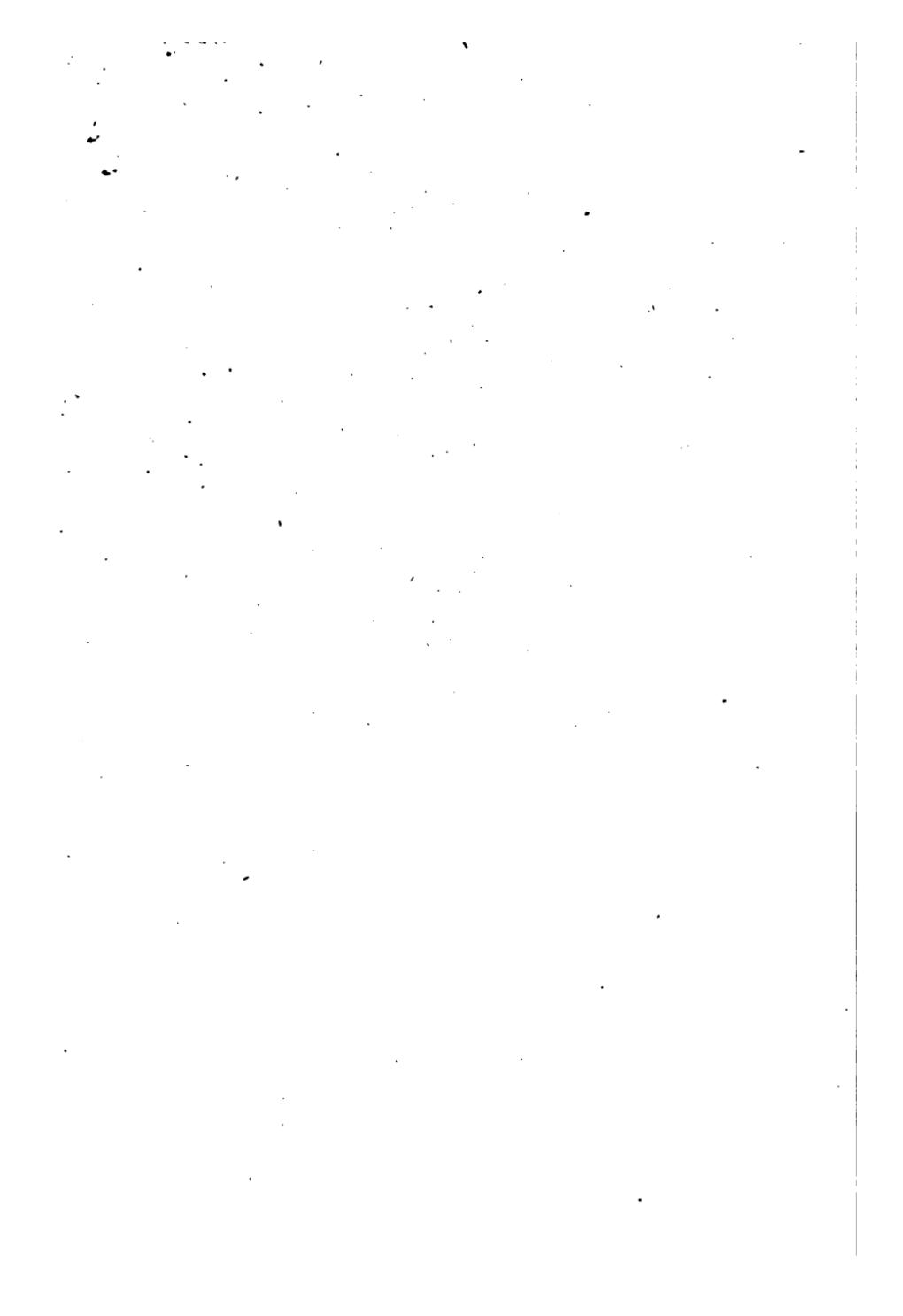




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CHAPTER I.

MY BIRTHPLACE AND PARENTAGE.

TELL now I never thought of writing a book. Not that I am unaccustomed to the art of composition, having not only indited many sermons since I became a probationer, but a pamphlet on the religious and physical condition of the poorer classes in our large towns, offered by me to a publisher ten years ago, but which it did not suit him to accept, except on terms to which prudence forbade me to accede. Still, I am doubtful if my gifts fit me to become an author, for I have never been what is called a “popular” preacher; though at the same time it is but justice to myself to mention that divers judicious persons have expressed favourable opinions anent my pulpit ministrations. One thing, however, is certain—my gifts, whatever they amount to, have never yet procured me a manse and stipend.

I was sitting some evenings ago in my parlour in the old town of Edinburgh. I was somewhat low in spirits, for the weather had been very rainy for some weeks, and the quiet street in which I live is particularly dull at such seasons. I was resting in my easy-chair by the fireside, and as my eyes were fixed upon the glowing embers I began, half-consciously, to make out pictures in them.

I know not how it happened, but that night the whole fire seemed thronged with old scenes and faces. They shifted and changed like the shadows on a green hill-side, allowing me time to recognise them, and then vanishing. There was the manse I was born in, with the little round window that looked like the eye of the house, high up in the front gable; the garden behind, with its trim walks edged with box; the grass plot, with its border of snowdrops and white lilies in their seasons, on one side; and on the other, separated from the manse by a low wall and a row of beech-trees, the sloping braes of the kirk glen with the burn wimpling between them. As to the faces—they were those of some once very dear to me, but

who have long passed away, leaving me a lonely grey-haired man.

And as I mused over the old times, the thought somehow came into my mind to write the story of my life. I do it not with an eye to publicity, though if these experiences of mine are found in my repositories at my death, my executors are at liberty to make what use of them they please.

When I read the biography of any man, I am not satisfied unless it gives me a clear impression of who and what were they to whom he owed his being, and his first impulses towards good or evil. Judging of other minds by my own, I therefore purpose to give some account of my honoured parents and of my *calf-days*, before entering on the events of my riper and more experienced years. I must premise, however, that I have nothing striking or new to tell. But though my life hath been chequered by little that is strange and marvellous, though I have not been visited by unusual storms or blessed with much sunshine, I hold it a truth that the history of the humblest individual, faithfully rendered, hath in it both solemn and instructive lessons. Who, indeed, can

paint aright the struggling inner life—the hopes, the joys, the sorrows, the weary, weary conflicts of an immortal soul?

I was born in an old-fashioned manse in a quiet southland parish. A bonny green spot it was, lying among hills that gathered round as if seeking to hide it in their bosom. It was a land of rich pasture and of springing water; every hillside had its rill, gushing and sparkling in the sunshine, and singing the praises of Him who can bless and beautify the solitary wilderness. Our farmers devoted themselves less to raising corn than to rearing cattle. The numerous herds and flocks which speckled the face of the country were an animating sight; and I still seem to hear the deep lowings and bleatings which echoed from hill to hill, in the calm quiet evenings of summer. What the grassy slopes of Bashan and Gilead were to the pastoral tribes of ancient Israel, our hills were to the simple but independent race that dwelt among them.

In imagination I am again sitting on one of the green slopes. It is evening, and the shadows are fast lengthening on the grass. Around me, hill

rises behind hill, none of them attaining great elevation, but green and smooth to the very summits. Here and there is a scanty sprinkling of brushwood ; but trees there are none, except those patriarchal ones which shade the roofs of the lone farmhouses and shepherds' cots that peep out from the quiet openings in the hills. At different points streams glitter in the setting sun. Yonder goes a long file of milch cows towards a gate, lowing impatiently for the loitering milkers ; how long and fantastic are the shadows of the cattle upon the sward ! Hark to the bleating of the lambs from the higher pastures, and to the mothers' response !

And there beneath, to the right, is my old home —manse and kirk and kirkyard glinting in the evening sunshine. There is the quaint two-leafed door, innocent in our time of lock and key, and often left unbarred at night—with little Kate, our spaniel dog, lying on its step. Yonder is the mossy apple-tree, on a branch of which my poor brother Archie and I used to play at see-saw ; with the great barberry bush beside it—many a pricked finger did it give us when gathering its

fruit for my mother to pickle. That sunny orchard sloping so gradually to the little burn, what sports we have had under its old gnarled trees ; the sunshine is still trickling like water down their trunks, and flooding the turf beneath with bright quivering patches. And on that stone seat under the large pear-tree, how often did my mother sit at her seam while we played among the trees at "hide and seek" or "Jenny Jo" !

The kirk is ancient, and has the smallest of belfries. The people said the bell was cracked, which might account for the unpunctuality of many of them on Sabbaths. But to me it seemed to utter sweet music ; and it was a proud moment of my life when old David, our betheral, permitted me for the first time to ring it. With what awe and reverence did I use to peep into the dusky hole in which it hung silent from Sabbath to Sabbath, for to me the bell was instinct with a strange, mysterious life, and I would not have been shut up alone with it for a world ! In the dreary, gusty winter nights, indeed, the thought of it was a terror to me.

Once more I turn my eyes on the green hills

My Birthplace and Parentage. 7

and swelling pastures. There may be a bareness, a monotony in the landscape to those accustomed to a rich and wooded country, but to me it seems very calm, very peaceful, strangely beautiful—like the face of a sweet and gracious woman.



CHAPTER II.

DOMESTIC LIFE.

MY father was minister of the parish, a devout and worthy man, who discharged his duties conscientiously, but cared little to make a noise in the world. He was a person of considerable erudition, however, and read in his Greek Testament every morning. He was of a stately presence even at the time when I can best remember him—when he was well up in years,—and which harmonised well with a certain formality of manner which usually impressed strangers.

He was of middle age before he got possession of the living, having been for twelve years assistant and successor to the previous minister, Dr. Bertie, who was in feeble health. My mother was very young when she became engaged to him, and she waited patiently all these years, though she saw her youth and bloom departing from her, and had

more than one opportunity of being comfortably settled in life; but it was James Morrison or no one. They were married whenever the manse was put in order. A legacy of a few hundred pounds, opportunely left to my father by a distant relative, furnished it. The furniture was all good substantial mahogany, fitted to stand wear and tear, with no carving or ornamental work about it. My mother provided the necessary silver articles, the blankets and napery, her own chest of drawers, and the best bed with the brown moreen curtains, which now stands in my guest chamber, the hangings being, of course, somewhat worn and faded with the use of years.

My mother had little portion, but she made up for it by her thrift. She was one who could "put to her hand," as the saying is; make her husband's shirts, knit his stockings—ay, cook his dinner if need were, and yet at all times be a lady. It used to be said of her that her sixpence went as far as most people's shilling; but it was not from penuriousnesss: he had a wise liberality of spirit. She was a person of low stature and slim make, with a pale but clear complexion and gentle look.

Everybody liked her, for she was no scandal-monger, but ever loving peace and quietness. She had a peculiar knack in helping people to help themselves, procuring spinning for the old women, and little jobs about the gentlemen's policies and farmers' steadings for the bairns ; and this she said was better than almsgiving, for it fostered independence.

Nor was her own wheel idle : she could spin with the best of them ; and not merely on the little fancy wheel on which ladies of that time spun fine lint in their parlours, but on the "muckle wheel" itself. She kept it in the nursery, and on it she and Bell, our old bairn's-maid, spun many a roll of white woollen stuff, and many a goodly piece of linen, fine, and yet of a strength and durability that would laugh to scorn most of the fabrics of the present day.

It was during the winter season that the wheel was busiest. Let me try to recall one of those long-past evenings, the remembrance of which has such a melancholy charm for me.

It is a keen frosty night, and all is silent and glimmering white out of doors. The beech-trees

stretch their bare wintry arms motionless against the sky; the rime is fast settling down upon them, and upon the shrubs that border the walk. I cannot see this from the nursery, but I got a glimpse of it from the staircase window as we came up from the parlour after tea. The panes to-morrow morning will be dim and rich with the fantastic blazonry which an invisible finger has already begun to trace upon them. The stars are looking solemnly down on the skylight window of our nursery. I have been glancing timidly up at them at intervals since they have appeared, for they awe me, these stars; they exercise a kind of weird influence over me which forces me to watch them. I love the window in the daytime, though its only view is a little patch of sky, and though the raindrops often patter so fiercely upon it as to make me hide my head in Bell's lap in terror—for there the blithe light streams in, and the birds come twittering around it; but at night I am haunted by these mysterious eye-like stars, which seem gazing in on me from the darkness.

And yet the sky window is not the object of greatest dread to me in our peaceful nursery.

There is the Dark end, as it is called in the household, so near that to cross the intervening space which separates it from the nursery and leads to the staircase its door must be passed, sunk so deeply in the shadow of the great napery press that one can never be quite certain it is shut; for the little round window in the front gable alone gives light to this dusky vestibule. This apartment was a large lumber-room corresponding to the nursery, whose window had been boarded up to save the tax. It was never entered by any one but my mother, who kept her store of wool and lint in it. A great chest covered with a hairy skin and ornamented with rows of tarnished brass nails, stood in the centre of the room, concerning which there was a household tradition that it was full of important law papers, which, examined properly, would be found to entitle us to a fortune. When old enough to attempt this, I found they had belonged to the relative who left my father a legacy, and that they were only receipts and old business letters.

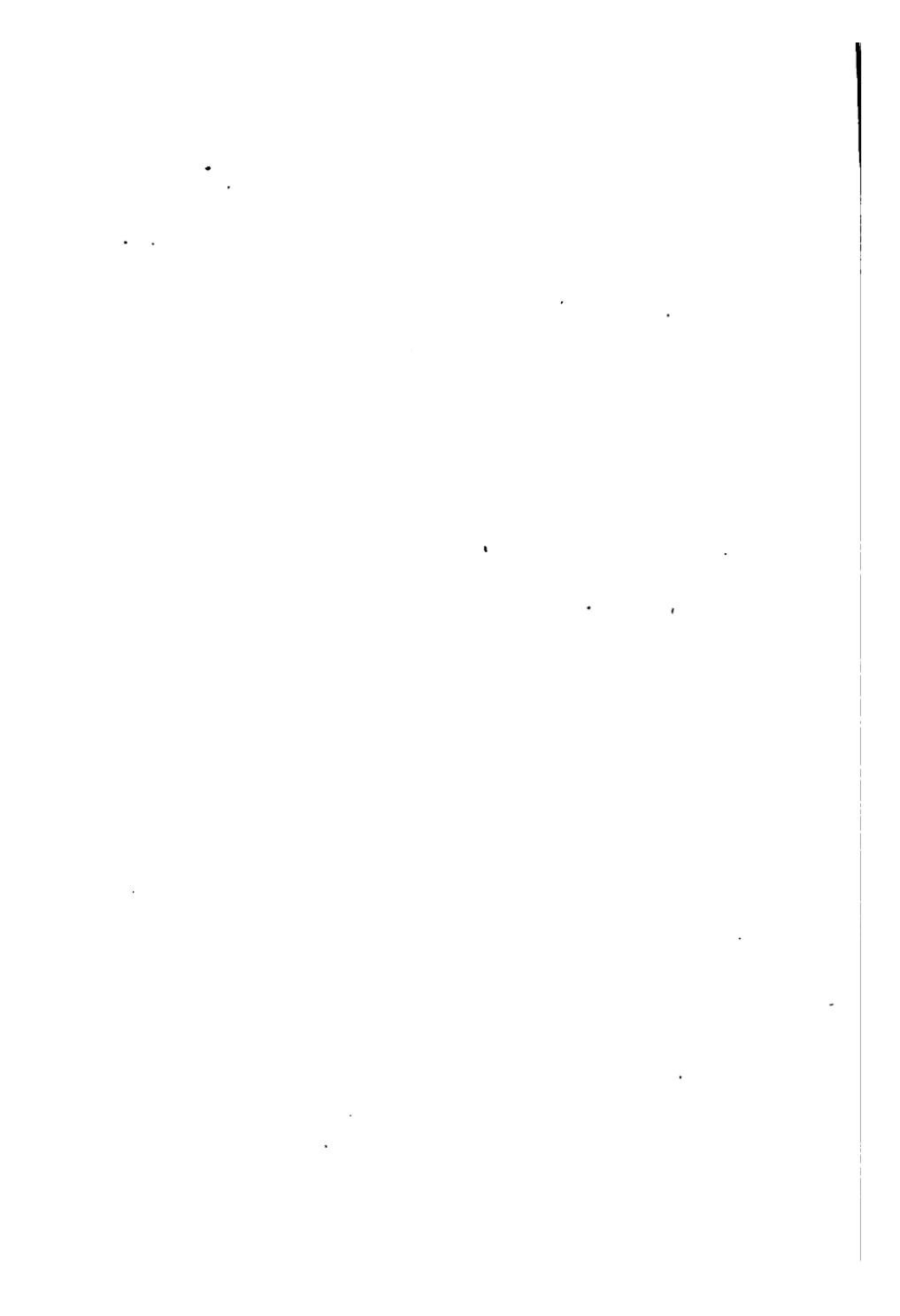
We youngsters firmly believed that this room was haunted by an evil spirit. I suspect the notion

originated from some undefined threatenings of Bell's in a time of nursery insubordination, which our imaginations invested with supernatural horrors. We occasionally ventured into it in our mother's company, for our confidence in her protection was unlimited, and our curiosity was at least as great as our fears; besides, the winter's provision of apples lay in one corner; but the door must always be set wide open, and the slightest flickering of the candle, which was necessary there even in the daytime, would make us fly from the room in terror.

Notwithstanding its questionable neighbourhood, the nursery is a cheerful room on a winter's evening. A lamp burns on the table, but the chief light is from the fire, which blazes brightly from the frosty air, and beside the high fender my mother sits at her wheel. She wears a white apron to save her gown from the lint she spins. We bairns—there were three of us—are clustered round her, admiring how fast she turns the wheel, and shouting with mischievous glee when the thread chances to snap. My mother, though not a trained singer, had a voice as clear and sweet as a lintie's;

and many an old tune she knew, the sound of which now—especially when heard unexpectedly—ever gives me a pain at the heart. And there she would sit in her own particular high-backed chair, and sing to us such songs as “My boy Tammie,” or that most pathetic of Scottish ditties, “The flowers o’ the forest;” or else tell us old-fashioned nursery stories, which, if they had not much sense, had somehow a wonderful charm. And thus the evening would pass till we heard my father’s study door open and the parlour bell ring, which summoned us to go downstairs for family worship.

And winter after winter can I recall these simple domestic scenes, which were rarely interrupted by visitors. We lived so solitary a life that a new robin-redbreast come to the parlour window to be fed, or the track of a hare through the snow, was regarded by us as a striking incident. But where were children more happy than we?



CHAPTER III.

MY SCHOOL DAYS—THE GENTRY OF THE PARISH.

I WAS the youngest of the family. Archie, the eldest of us, was a gallant, frank-hearted laddie, with the curliest black hair and the blithest eyes I ever saw. My father allowed him to choose a profession, and he fixed upon that of medicine, hoping to get an appointment on board a man-of-war. He had a great yearning after a seafaring life, and he well knew that his mother would never consent to his entering the navy but as a peaceful surgeon. He and I were very unlike each other. My highest ambition was to be the minister of a quiet rural parish like my father: I disliked change and tumult. Our sister Mary was a bonny, sprightly lassie, with far more of Archie's disposition than of mine. She was her father's darling—the very apple of his eye.

Archie and I were sent to the parish school. My experiences there were far from pleasant, for the master was one of those mean souls who tyrannise over the weak and timid, and wink at the faults of the bold. I had only one friend at school—young Adam Bowman, of the Culdees Loch Farm. How vividly these old times come back to me as I write his name! His father was a thriving farmer, and Adam was his only child. I loved him as only a shy, solitary boy can love the companion who astonishes him by his preference. I loved him, do I say?—I love him still. More than forty years have rolled over Adam's head and mine since that period, and truly our friendship hath been somewhat like that of Jonathan and David, even “passing the love of woman.”

When Archie was fourteen he was sent to Edinburgh College; Mary was placed in a boarding-school in that city at the same time. Our parents thought that a good education was the best portion they could bestow on their children, and my mother's thrift and wise foresight rendered it possible. I was too young then for college, and

my health was delicate. This did me the good service of transferring me from Mr. Bairnsfather's tuition to my father's, under which I really began to learn. I was much in the open air, my mother thinking it better physic for me than all the doctors' drugs in the kingdom. Sheep-shearings, wanderings by the burn in the glen till every wavy link of it was familiar to me, lyings on the grass in the orchard watching the blue sky and the sunshine stealing through the fluttering leaves of the spreading boughs, made every summer there like a long holiday. Besides, I was always my mother's companion in her visits either to rich or poor.

Of the former we had only two resident families within walking distance—Mr. Kennedy of Hallcraigs, and the Farquharsons of the Hirsel. The Kennedys were only with us during the summer and autumn; they always spent the winter in Edinburgh. They were a fine family, and much respected in the district. Hallcraigs was a large property, and the mansion-house was a handsome modern building, with a very tasty lawn and shrubbery, and many neat, well-kept walks about it.

The Hirsel family were of a more ancient pattern of manners—your regular proud old gentry, standing up for all the privileges of their order, and not yielding an iota of them, though it might amount to nothing more important than the splitting of a straw. But their family tree was of far greater longitude than their rent-roll in these days, and that might partly account for it. The founder of the family had been one of the greatest reivers of his time on the Scottish border, carrying off sometimes a hundred head of cattle at a sweep, besides setting every barnyard and farmhouse he met with on the English border during his raid in a low, as Miss Philadelphia Farquharson used often to boast. I marvelled to hear her talk thus to my mother, thinking that if her forbear had reared and fed the stirks instead of stolen them, it would have been more creditable to the family. But I dared not say so to Miss Philly, being but a young lad, and standing much in awe of her; for truly she had a touch of the old reiver's grimness about her own aspect, especially about her mouth and cheek-bones, which were very square and strong. Her voice, too, was harsh and masculine in its tones;

and few were courageous enough to differ from her; and my mother, whom the mere waff of Miss Philly's garments was almost sufficient to knock down, was certainly not one of them.

Miss Farquharson was more womanly, though quite as stately as her younger sister; but having the misfortune to be born with a club foot, which she tried to conceal by wearing long gowns, was not very active in her habits. A short walk round the garden after breakfast was the extent of her daily exercise. She used to sit for the greater part of the day on a settee in the drawing-room, working at something called knotting, with a volume of Sir Charles Grandison or the "Spectator" on a little long-legged table beside her. Anything more modern in literature she professed to despise as wholly unfitted to form the taste or correct the morals of the age. Flowers she seemed to have no love for, nor had she even a dog or a cat for a pet, and she reminded one of nothing so much as of a great wooden doll made to utter sounds and imitate human actions by some internal machinery.

She was very precise and punctual in all her

habits. I still remember the air of offended dignity with which she exhibited the face of an heir-loom of a watch to my parents, on one of the rare occasions on which we were invited to drink tea at the Hirsel. "Mr. and Mrs. Morrison," she said, "are you aware that you are fully five minutes behind your time?"

It was a most uncomfortable house to bairns, who were expected to sit still in their chairs all the evening, and were constantly admonished not to spill their tea or scatter crumbs upon the carpet; and Miss Philly cut the bread-and-butter shamefully thin.

As for Mr. Farquharson, the laird, he seemed a man who had come into the world by mistake, and had found nothing to do in it. He was a tall, stooping, narrow-chested, melancholy-looking gentleman, with a long drooping nose, which had generally a snuff-drop attached to it; who sat very close to the fire, and was always talking about taking medicine. Miss Philly managed all his affairs for him, doctoring included. He never condescended to notice me, and I confess that I cherished a strong but secret dislike and contempt for him.

It was a peaked, ivy-covered, rambling old house, the Hirsel, with somewhat of the look of a fortalice about it ; and, indeed, the most ancient part of it was said to have been built by the old reiver himself. There the most trivial domestic arrangements were matters of solemn debate and deliberation, as if the welfare of the whole community around depended on whether the green terrace walk was mown this day or the next, or on Peggy cook putting a corn more pepper in the soup. They would have thought that the world was coming to its end if they could have been made to understand how little their neighbours cared about them.

No beggar was bold enough to venture up the Hirsel avenue, for the family purposely kept a dog of so ferocious a disposition chained close to the kitchen door, that no stranger durst approach him. And, truly, it is my deliberate opinion that persons who take such precautions to keep the poor at a distance from their habitations, deserve the contempt and execration of men, though they should be able to count their lineage as far back as to the days of Noah.

The summer vacations always brought back Archie and Mary to the manse. It was a great pleasure to us to hear the town news, and to see how proficient in all lady accomplishments our Mary was growing, for she could not only play the pianoforte, but she could execute curious embroideries and even pictures in silk.

I look up as I write to one of these pictures, which, framed and glazed, hangs above my chimney-piece. It represents a female figure bending over a grave and strewing flowers upon it. She leans upon a monument, and a tree, probably intended for a weeping willow, droops above it. It is a fanciful and tasteful piece, but it rouses a crowd of painful memories in my bosom. Alas! the hand that wrought it has long been mouldering in the grave.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLOUD RISES LIKE A MAN'S HAND.

I WAS in my fourteenth year when my father died. That was a year indeed! Woe's me; the griefs of a lifetime were crowded into it. The typhus fever got into the manse. My sister Mary brought the infection with her from Edinburgh. She and Archie came home together at the close of the college season. Oh, what a joyful day that was in the manse!—the last in our time.

I remember, as if all had happened yesterday, the preparations made to welcome them home. My mother and the maids were busy house-cleaning for days. I could see no necessity for it, the rooms being always kept in perfect order; but Jess Gillespie, our kitchen-maid, declared it absolutely needful, “for wasna Miss Mary, the bonny lamb, comin’ hame’ noo for gude and a’? And after living sae lang in a grand town like

Edinburgh, she would be sure to hae a gleg ee for onything that wasna seemly and particular."

So Mary's little room was decked like a bridal bower, with the snowiest linen and curtains, while the furniture was rubbed almost as bright as her small mirror in the japanned frame. I followed my mother from room to room on the day of their arrival, feeling a pleasing excitement in the stir around me. Once I came upon her unobserved ; it was in Mary's room, to which she was putting the finishing touches, which no one could do as well as herself. I then got a deep look into my mother's heart, where, with a tender loving expression of countenance, she suddenly stooped down, and kissed the counterpane of the neat bed, as if in imagination she saw her daughter already reposing there.

The coach by which they were to travel passed within half a mile of the manse, reaching us early in the evening. I thought the day would never wear on, and would fain have persuaded my mother to leave the house to meet them an hour earlier than necessary. At last we set out, accompanied by Jess Gillespie and Nelly—(the latter

had just entered our service, as my mother kept only one servant in Archie and Mary's absence,) — who were ready to carry the luggage up to the manse.

It was a grey, dull evening, with a closeness in the air and a heavy mist upon the hills. We had to wait a long time at the cross-road for the coach. It came in sight at last on the top of a brae, but then disappeared for many weary minutes in the hollow. As it slowly ascended from it, we caught sight of a handkerchief waving on the roof. I ran forward, and there was Archie on the box-seat, his black eyes gleaming with fear as he looked down on me, and Mary's eager face at the window watching for us.

How happy we were as we walked up the quiet road to the manse. Both Archie and Mary were so grown and improved. She was quite a woman now, and a comely creature she looked. When we came in sight of the manse, there was my father at the gate waiting for us, and as soon as Mary saw him she bounded forward like a young fawn, and in another minute her arms were clinging round his neck.

The tea-table had been spread before we went to meet them, but while the tea was infusing, Mary was taken into the best parlour, and introduced to the pianoforte, which my father had recently purchased for her at the sale of the old Lady Nettlewood's furniture in the next parish, and which was to be a surprise to Mary on her return. And very grand I thought it looked, standing at the little gilt mirror at the bottom of the room. She sat down and played my father's favourite tune on it, and very wonderful was her music to me and to the two maids, who came to listen at the half-open door.

We had family worship at an early hour, for though Mary was suffering from headache and fatigue, she was unwilling to go to bed till it was over. Once more we all knelt together at the throne of grace, an undivided family. Alas! that evening may well dwell in my recollection, for my bonny sister Mary sickened the next day, and never again raised her young head from the pillow which her mother had so tenderly smoothed for it.

And now a time of darkness and trial came

upon us. We had no resident medical man of our own, but twice a day old Dr. Lachlan from Cruikstone parish rode over to see Mary. The servants went about their work on tiptoe through the hushed and stricken house. My father shut himself up in his study, seldom coming out, except to our melancholy meals. Archie, poor fellow, could not settle to any employment, or rest more than a few minutes in one place. As for me, I used to sit almost all day on the staircase in sight of Mary's room, listening anxiously to every sound within it, and sometimes getting a word with my mother when she came out, which she often did at last just to try to comfort me.

When Mary's illness was ascertained to be typhus fever every precaution was taken to prevent the spread of infection. But they proved of no avail, for on the ninth day of Mary's case Archie was seized, and Jess Gillespie, poor thing, two days afterwards. My mother sent for old Bell, our former nursemaid, who was still strong and hale for her years, to help to nurse the sick, that Nelly, then a young girl, might not need to enter the fever rooms. They would have sent me

out of the house, but they could ask no one to run the risk of taking me in ; and so, to my own contentment, I was allowed to remain, though charged to keep at a distance from the sick.

At length, on the fourteenth day of Mary's illness, when I was sitting sorrowfully in my usual place on the stair, my mother came hastily out of the sick-room with the tears running down her cheeks, and in a low voice bade me go immediately for my father. I was so troubled by the sight of her distress that I could not speak to her, and I hastened to the study with the message. My father was leaning his elbows on the table, and his face was hidden by his hands when I entered. He rose, passed me silently, and went up to Mary's room. I followed him at some distance, and stood in great agitation in the passage outside. I had been forbidden to enter the room. But surely, thought I, if my dear sister Mary is dying, they will not refuse to let me look on her once more—and I wept bitterly at the supposition that it might indeed be only once more. I could hear no movement, or any sound whatever from the room. There was a

solemn silence through the house, for poor Archie, who had been delirious during the past night, was now asleep. I could bear the suspense no longer, and, gently pushing open the door, I edged myself unobserved into the room.

My sister was just passing away, and I was transfixed by the first sight I had had of death. Was it possible that that ghastly form upon the bed was our bonny joyous Mary? My father and mother stood on opposite sides of it, gazing down upon her. My father's back was towards me, but I saw my mother's face, down which large tears were quietly rolling and dropping unheeded on the coverlet. She was quite unconscious of my presence, and I remained at the door, listening to the slow and laboured breathing from the bed.

It ceased suddenly; and then, after a pause, my mother stooped, tenderly kissed the corpse, and closed its eyes. But my father continued to stand silent and motionless, sighing heavily; and notwithstanding my distress, I was struck with something unusual in his attitude. My mother herself observed it at the same moment that she

became aware of my presence ; and, looking much alarmed, she came round to his side of the bed, and took hold of his arm to support him. He did not speak, but raised his hand to his head, as if oppressed there. Between us we got him to his own room. That hour he took to his bed, and it was known throughout all the parish by the next morning that my father himself was down with the fever.

And now many cares pressed on my inexperienced head ; duties that I was most unfit for devolved upon me. I look back and wonder now how I discharged them. I was chief mourner at Mary's funeral. Never shall I forget the anguish with which, assisted by good old Dr. Lachlan, I lowered the cord of her coffin into the grave. I seemed to be burying something of myself there —all youthful hopes and pleasures ; for which of them was not associated with her ?—and I felt as if I could never be happy again. I thought of the night of her home-coming, and of all our pleasant anticipations concerning her, till my heart was nigh to bursting ; and when Dr. Lachlan considerately led me home by the short private path

through the orchard, the flood of recollections associated with that spot so overwhelmed me that I fell fainting on the grass. How the doctor got me into the house I know not, but I awoke as from a troubled sleep to find myself lying in a bed in Archie's room—our old nursery—with Bell bathing my forehead with vinegar, while I was so grievously sick and so pained in all my limbs, that I cared not even to ask if I had taken the fever.

And after that all is vague and indistinct in my memory, a phantasmagoria of strange shapes and wild hurrying figures, and of thoughts that constantly mocked and eluded me. But amidst all my distempered fancies I always recognized my mother, and her presence never failed to soothe me. Poor woman ! she was then nursing my father day and night, with little hope in her heart that any of us would be spared to her.

I awakened at length to perfect consciousness and collectedness of mind. I had got the turn, as it is called ; but I was almost as weak and helpless as a baby. I was content for days to lie perfectly still, asking no questions, and caring for nothing but food and sleep. But as my

strength began to return I grew anxious to hear of others. Archie lay in the adjoining bed, pale and emaciated, with all his curly locks shaven off ; but he, like me, was recovering. My father and Jess Gillespie, how were they ? I could learn nothing from old Bell, who silenced me with all her former authority ; and even my mother, when she visited our room, significantly pressed her finger on her lips when I attempted to open mine. The following morning we did not see her ; I resolved to apply to the doctor for information. How I wearied for his visit that forenoon ! I put the question whenever he approached my bed. He gave me no answer for some minutes ; he was feeling my pulse, and his eyes were fixed on the face of his watch. I suppose he thought it better to tell me the truth, lest I should learn it accidentally, or through some less safe channel. Archie, poor fellow, knew it already. Jess Gillespie had been dead two days ; my father had died that morning.

I was too weak for violent emotion ; but never shall I cease to remember the intense desolation of that slowly passing day and evening—" all Thy

billows and Thy waves went over me." I had a yearning desire to see my mother, and to try to comfort her; but she, poor afflicted woman, was in bed I was told, exhausted both in body and in mind; and I turned my face to the wall and wept in secret.

I had a sore struggle for life, and I recovered slowly; but the fever must have wrought a favourable change in my constitution, for since that period I have enjoyed uninterrupted though not robust health. I was *sweert sweert* (unwilling) to go downstairs, weakly deferring it from day to day on some pretext or another; I wanted courage to face the stillness and desolation of the sitting-rooms. I had to do it at last, and it brought a faint smile to my mother's worn face to see me comfortably settled in my father's easy-chair, though she turned it hastily from me the next moment to hide her tears. Archie had now nearly recovered his former strength, and could take exercise in the open air; and dowie-like he looked, as from the parlour window I watched him wandering slowly along the garden walks. All his old gleesomeness and fun were gone; or if for a moment there appeared a flash of his

former spirit, it was sure to be followed by moods of deeper dejection and almost angry sorrow.

It was now necessary to form some plan for the future. We had nothing to live on now but the yearly sum to which my mother was entitled from the ministers' widows' fund, and the interest of five hundred pounds, her fortune. Such an income would not maintain us and pay our college expenses. We were not long in getting some comfort as to Archie's prospects, which were the chief thing. The laird of Hallcraigs—I must not forget to mention the great attention shown by that family during our affliction—offered to procure him an appointment whenever he had passed as surgeon; and good interest the laird had, having friends in high places, besides a brother in the navy, who afterwards greatly distinguished himself in the war.

My father's only relations were distant ones, who could be of no assistance to us. My mother had friends in Canada, but they had lost sight of each other. She had a cousin twice removed, however, in Edinburgh, who had been formerly in trade, but who had now retired from business. He was a

strict religious professor, and had been used to pay us a visit at the time of the summer communion. We young folks stood much in awe of him, for he was a severe and narrow-minded man, dogmatic and overbearing. Our intercourse had come to an abrupt close about two years prior to this period. It was occasioned by his having caught me with a copy of the "Gentle Shepherd," which I was devouring, unobserved, as I thought, in a cunning corner behind the parlour sofa on a rainy day. The light on my page becoming suddenly obscured, I looked up, and beheld Cousin Braidfute's grim countenance glowering down on me over the back of the sofa. Great was my dismay, and awful was the reproof administered to me for thus mis-spending my time. And leaving me weeping, half from disappointment and half from fear of his warnings, he carried the offending book to my mother, on whom he bestowed a similar reprimand for indulging her family in such pastimes.

But the result was not satisfactory to Mr. Braidfute. My gentle mother was troubled in conscience by this reproof, and could not conceal it from my father, whom it seriously displeased on

her account, and because he had given me permission to read the book. And with all civility he gave Mr. Braidsute clearly to understand that he would not permit such interference with his family; which, however, gave that individual such offence that he speedily returned to Edinburgh, from whence he penned a letter to my mother containing such severe animadversions on her and my father's conduct, and such denunciations anent the sin of reading light and unprofitable books, that he was never again invited to the manse. I think my mother secretly regretted it: she could bear much from Cousin Braidsute (as she always called him) for his mother's sake, who had shown her kindness in her youth.

This family disagreement rendered it impossible for my mother to ask our relative's advice on our affairs, which she would gladly have done; for "Cousin Braidsute," she said, "had ever a keen eye for business, and though so strict a professor, was a shrewd and practical man." We had sent him intimations of the deaths in the family, but he had taken no notice of them as yet, and my mother hardly expected he would.

"We must just struggle on by ourselves, Matthew, my dear," she said to me, as she smiled encouragingly through her tears; "you and Archie have always been good bairns to me, and there is no fear but we shall get on somehow, for God is very tender to the widow and the orphan."

So at length we decided to move into Edinburgh, hire a good flat, and endeavour to procure genteel lodgers.

About six weeks after my father's death came a letter from Cousin Braidsfute. It was in bad taste, containing reflections, not only on the living, but the dead; but still friendly enough, considering the nature of the man. My mother answered it immediately, detailing our plans, and requesting his opinion upon them. Cousin Braidsfute liked nothing better than to give advice; so we soon received a reply, generally approving of our arrangements, and containing an offer to look out a suitable house for us, if one was to be found at this season. This relieved my mother of her greatest anxiety. And we soon heard that he had engaged a first flat for us in a respectable locality at a moderate rent. He would not become

security for us, however; but we had no difficulty with Mr. Tait, of Cruikstone parish.

We had a busy time preparing for moving. I was of some use to my mother, but Archie packed all my father's books and manuscripts, and was ever ready to lift heavy burdens, or to do anything that required strength and activity. At other times he was best out of the way, for he was very apt to throw down and break things, especially crockery.

The day came at last when we behoved to leave the manse, and the people among whom we had lived for so many years. Adam Bowman's father sent his carts and men all the way to Edinburgh with our furniture free of cost.

“We'll ca' the wee room yours after this, Mr. Matthew,” said Adam's mother, on bidding me farewell; “and the oftener you come to fill it, the blither will we a' be. Eh! but Adam, puir fallow, will miss you.”

What a moment of sorrow it was when we turned a last look upon our late pleasant home, and left my father and Mary behind lying in the quiet kirkyard!

CHAPTER V.

MR. KEMP THE LAWYER AND HIS SISTER.

IT was a great change to me, living in town. No doubt I was at first much attracted by the novelty of everything around me; but this gradually wore off, and I began secretly to pine for the repose and freedom of my old home. The city air wanted elasticity, and depressed my spirits. Oh, how my imagination dwelt on the green pastures and crystal waters of my native place, and often did I long for the wings of a bird that I might flee thither and be at rest. It seemed to me a haven of peace and serenity, and those that abode there were to me the blessed and excellent of the earth.

Cousin Braidsute had got us a reasonably good house, though it was a confined and dingy place compared with the manse. Our relative was undoubtedly a sagacious and practical man, but he

interfered too much in our concerns, and scarcely allowed us a voice in them. We soon grew to feel as if his shadow were always hovering over the house, and the fear of offending him made my mother timid and nervous. Besides, he was deficient in hospitality, considering that we were strangers in the town.

We speedily got a good lodger for our best parlour and the adjoining bedroom. He was sent to us by Mr. Kemp, the writer to the *Signet*, to whom we got a letter of introduction from Mr. Tait. A small college bursary in the gift of the Senatus had become vacant through the death of the holder; and Mr. Tait thought that Mr. Kemp, from his influential position, might be able to procure it for me. It was a great undertaking for my mother to call upon a stranger and a lawyer, but the chance of the bursary, small as it was, was not to be lost; and the very day that we received the letter, without consulting Cousin Braidsute, who otherwise would have had his finger in the pie, she and I set off to call upon Mr. Kemp in George's Square.

We found it one of the largest houses in the

square. It looked so grand and imposing that we feared Mr. Kemp might be a proud man, and not very accessible to strangers in our now reduced circumstances. So we took a turn round by the garden railing in the centre to gain courage before ringing the door-bell. But the longer we delayed the more nervous we grew; besides, as I suggested, some other person might have heard of the bursary, and be on his way to speak to Mr. Kemp about it, and by dilly-dallying I might lose it. This supposition quickened our movements, and in another minute we had rung the bell.

The servant who appeared said that her master was at present engaged, but showed us into the dining-room to wait for him. It was a large, handsome, well-furnished apartment, and the portrait of a gentleman above the mantelpiece catching my eye as I entered, lightened my spirits, for I thought that it probably was a likeness of Mr. Kemp, and the face, though pernickity, was a very benevolent one.

“I wish it was over, Matthew, my dear,” said my poor mother.

“I think,” said I, to encourage her, “that that

picture must be a likeness of Mr. Kemp, mother ; and though the face is rather singular, it has a kind look."

" Do you think so, my dear ?" said she, gazing wistfully up at it, and then I saw that her eyes were full of tears. She looked at it for a few moments only, then turned to the window, and sat as if examining the square through the low blinds, but utterly unconscious, I was sure, of what she saw. I knew she was thinking of former days, when no such cares as this devolved upon her ; and that she was feeling how helpless and desolate a woman is who is a widow, and especially a widow with straitened means.

We had to wait a considerable time ; but at last there was a sound of voices in the lobby, followed by the shutting of the house door. Then the door of the dining-room was suddenly burst open—that is the only word that describes the action—and a little gentleman in a state of apparent hurry and excitement ran rather than walked into the room. He was without doubt the original of the portrait that I had been contemplating. He was small in stature, and extremely thin and meagre, and every

line of his face and motion of his body showed activity and energy. His eyes were very black and keen, and as he entered they examined us with a rapid and penetrating glance. I had never seen a Frenchman then, or I should have taken him for one. He was dressed with great neatness, and he wore powder in his hair, though it had then fallen into disuse.

His entrance was so startling and so unlike that of a grave business man, that my mother and I in our surprise almost jumped from our seats. He politely motioned us to resume them, and sitting down himself by the table, began to drum restlessly with his fingers upon it.

“Good morning, madam; what is your business with me?” he inquired, in tones as abrupt and rapid as his movements.

My mother's presence of mind had entirely deserted her, and instead of presenting our letter of introduction to Mr. Kemp, in her agitation she dropped it on the carpet. He instantly picked it up, and seeing it was directed to himself, broke the seal, and began to read after glancing at the signature. While reading, he more than once

raised his eyes and looked at us over the letter, and I felt that I had never before encountered such a searching glance. On finishing, he folded it up lengthways, made some jottings with his pencil on the back of it, and then put it into his pocket. He then spoke both gently and compassionately to my poor mother, who looked very sad and feeble in her deep widow's weeds.

"I have met with your late husband, madam," he said.

"Indeed, sir," said my mother, evidently relieved.

"A worthy man, madam; a good scholar and a worthy man. This is your son, madam?"

"My younger son, Matthew, sir."

"You have come to reside in town, madam, I perceive. What is your direction?"

My mother gave it to him, and we were glad to see him take out the letter again and note it down—it looked business-like. Having restored the letter to his pocket, he started up, hurried to the fireplace, and rung the bell.

"Let Miss Kemp know that I wish to see her here," he said, when the servant answered it.

I had been wondering whether he was a married man, but now supposed that a sister kept his house. He stood fidgeting on the hearthrug, twisting his fingers and puckering his face in an extraordinary fashion till the lady made her appearance.

She was the exact counterpart of himself. Indeed, so like were they, that people not intimately acquainted with them naturally supposed them to be twins, which they were not. Like him, she had a kind of birdlike quickness in all her movements, and such uprightness of carriage, especially of the head and neck, that at this first interview with her I thought she was probably suffering from a stiffness in the muscles of the latter. She was dressed with great, though somewhat old-fashioned, precision, and wore very brief petticoats, thus exhibiting a pair of the trimmest feet and ankles I have ever seen. Notwithstanding these peculiarities, her appearance was decidedly prepossessing, and she had a very lively, pleasant countenance, less indicative of acuteness of intellect than her brother's, but expressive both of singleness of mind, and goodness of heart. She came hurrying into the room, apologizing as she did so in a

chatty, sociable kind of way for keeping us waiting, though that did not exceed a few minutes, and she had to be called, she explained, from the upper floor of the house.

“This is Mrs. Morrison, Miss Kemp,” said her brother, as soon as she gave him the opportunity to speak, “and this is her son, Mr. Matthew.”

Miss Kemp shook hands with us in a kindly way, and then sat down beside my mother.

“Mrs. Morrison has just come to reside in Edinburgh, Miss Kemp,” continued the formal but polite little gentleman; “she is quite a stranger here, therefore I doubt not that you will easily discover some way in which you can be of service to her.”

“Certainly, brother, certainly,” said his sister, smiling affectionately on him as she sat bolt upright in her chair.

“And, Miss Kemp, you will have the goodness to explain to Mrs. Morrison the necessity for my leaving her at present—business must be attended to, madam, you are aware;” and paying no attention to my mother’s earnest endeavours to express her gratitude, he darted up to her, adding, “Your husband was a worthy man, madam; his piety and

learning would have obtained him a prominent position in the church but for his own modesty, and shall do all I can to serve his son." (How proud I was to hear my father thus spoken of!) "And Miss Kemp, allow me to recommend a glass of wine for Mrs. Morrison after—after her exertions."

He then shook hands with her, patted me on the shoulder in passing, and in another moment was out of the room.

My mother did not look quite at her ease at first; but Miss Kemp was so chatty and cordial as she trotted between the cupboard and table with the wine and cake, which she would not permit either of us to decline, that the little embarrassment soon wore off; and by the time my mother had taken her glass of wine—of which she seemed much the better—the pair were conversing like old friends. And before our visit was over she had told Miss Kemp all our little history. My poor mother could not speak of recent events without breaking down into weeping; and our kind hostess drew out her pocket-handkerchief and cried for sympathy.

It was a considerable time before she would

permit us to leave her. We said nothing to each other till we had walked some way from the door, and then the impulse came at once upon both of us to laugh at the start we got when Mr. Kemp suddenly burst into the room. But altogether, we thought we had made friends for ourselves.

"And I am sure we need them, Matthew, my dear," said my mother, sighing deeply.

"You will never need friends, mother," said I, "as long as your sons are to the fore;" at which words my mother put her arm within mine and looked lovingly into my face.

"God has been very good to us," she said, gratefully; "and I somehow think, Matthew, my dear, that you will get the bursary."

And I did get the bursary. Miss Kemp herself brought us the first news of it, and Archie was fortunately at home when she called.

CHAPTER VI.

OUR FIRST LODGER—COUSIN BRAIDFUTE'S HOUSE-HOLD, AND MANNER OF TRAINING CHILDREN.

THE lodger that we obtained through Mr. Kemp's recommendation was a Mr. Meggat, for many years chaplain in one of the principal town institutions. We were fortunate in getting him for our first lodger, when we were new to the business, for a more quiet, inoffensive inmate could not be, and he was as polite and ceremonious to my mother, and even to Nelly, as a lord.

He took a fancy to me, and often invited me into his parlour in the evenings, where he would read his poems to me and ask my opinion of them, boy though I was. Sometimes we would walk together in the meadows. I often think of our conversations during these walks. No dreaming boy has a greater faculty of building castles in the air than had worthy Mr. Meggat, who was

past middle age, and whose hair was already streaked with grey. He wished to be of service to me; and he was so, though not in the way he supposed—for, with all his little weaknesses, he was a sincere Christian and a perfect gentleman. It was fortunate for me that at a time of life when impressions are easily made upon the character, I was so much in the company of Mr. Meggat. The society of a cool, clear-headed, selfish man of the world is, I am persuaded, far more dangerous to a young lad than that of the most enthusiastic and romantic of visionaries.

Cousin Braidfute and Mr. Meggat never drew well together. The former openly expressed his contempt for our little lodger's somewhat finical niceness and refinement; and the latter's nerves were shocked with Mr. Braidfute's rude address and overbearing manners. Cousin Braidfute took it upon himself at last to reprove my mother for allowing me to be so much in Mr. Meggat's company.

“He will fill the lad's head with nonsense,” he said, roughly, “and he will be taking to the reading of novels and poetry-books instead of

learning his lessons ; especially," added Mr. Braidfute, with severe emphasis, " as I know from experience that he has an aptitude for these inventions of the devil already." Mr. Braidfute had not yet forgiven the episode of the "Gentle Shepherd."

" My father approved of my reading a certain class of poetry, Mr. Braidfute," I ventured to say ; " and he himself was a great admirer of Spenser and Herbert."

I suppose Cousin Braidfute had never heard of either before ; but he answered with a snarl, " Then, my lad, I hope he repented of it in time. The psalms of David and Erskine's gospel sonnets are poetry enough for any man."

These sonnets are unexceptionable in point of doctrine ; but as to poetical merit !

Archie's spirit was roused by this attack on Mr. Meggat and me, and he defended us manfully.

" Mr. Meggat's company," he said, " would harm no one, for he was out and out a gentleman ; and as for Matthew, there was not a lad at college who was more painstaking with his lessons : and if he did read poetry at a time, what was that to Mr.

Braidsute? what right had he to interfere with Matthew, or with anything in our mother's house? It would be fitter if he would set himself to rule his own."

And Archie shook back his curls, as was his custom when excited, and looked very fiercely at Cousin Braidsute.

My mother and I were greatly frightened by Archie's boldness, though I could not help admiring him for it; and especially by the insinuation contained in his last words, which Cousin Braidsute could not help wincing under; and indeed he was never so rude in Archie's presence afterwards. The fact was that this man, who was so stern and dictatorial in his neighbours' habitations, was quiet enough in his own. He was domineered over, not by a wife—which is no uncommon circumstance—but by his own hired servant. She was a high-spirited woman, and had gradually managed to get the upper hand of him soon after his wife's death. Though groaning under this subjection, he had not courage to free himself from it, but lived on from year to year in a kind of abject slavery that would have been pitiful

if it had not been contemptible. Moreover, he had a mind to marry again, it was understood, and more than once had progressed a certain length in courtship ; but Mistress Marget kept a jealous watch over his movements, and always succeeded in nipping his matrimonial projects in the bud.

It was a strange retribution that this man, who so roughly browbeat his equals, and in some respects his superiors, should be forced to tremble before a serving-woman. Cousin Braidfute, indeed, was scarcely to be recognised in his own house. He would fain have concealed his infirmity from us, and was very chary of his invitations even at the time of our arrival in Edinburgh, when in our unsettled state a little hospitality would have been desirable. But it could not be hid—we had not been a week in town before we discovered it ; and truly it afforded us no small diversion,—that is, Archie and me, for my mother was only shocked at the man's weakness.

As his relations we were particularly obnoxious to Mrs. Marget, and she conducted herself so uncivilly to my mother on the only occasion on which she called at the house, that she determined,

never to enter Cousin Braidfute's door again while the woman remained in his service. Archie and I suspected that she was jealous of my mother's designs upon Cousin Braidfute, but we could not have hinted such a thing to my mother, knowing the extreme indignation and disgust it would have caused her. She had gone to the house to see little Sarah Braidfute, his only child. She was about eight years old, and remarkably sharp and observant for her age. Unhappily situated as she was, poor thing, having a severe parent, and being entirely under the care of an unprincipled maid-servant, who set her an example of low cunning and evil temper, and made a perfect drudge of the child. I do not think, however, that the woman constantly maltreated her—even she had her blinks of good-humour; but it was easy to see that Sarah stood in great awe of her. The effect of this training was that little Sarah Braidfute was sly, selfish and untruthful; that she disliked home, and seemed never at ease in her father's or Marget's company. Her father was a tyrant in her eyes, always gloomy and dreadful. It was a frequent boast of his that his child dared not disobey him;

but she did, and with Marget's connivance. This we learnt from Sarah herself, who was frequently permitted to spend Saturday afternoons with us ; Marget not interfering, owing, I suppose, to the freedom it procured her. The child soon discovered that we might be trusted, and she chattered freely to us about the ways at home ; and, indeed, it was often grievous to us to observe what evidences she gave of a prying and unchildlike disposition.

We were much shocked when we first discovered that she was a thief. We had occasionally missed trifling articles before then, but supposed that they had fallen aside, as Nelly was honesty itself ; no one suspected Sarah of taking them. Nelly, like most young women, was fond of a bit of finery, and had treated herself to some yards of sky-blue ribbon to make bows and strings for her best cap. She put the ribbon into one of the kitchen drawers till she had leisure to make it up. On the following Saturday Sarah Braifute came to the house in the forenoon, and my mother having sent to obtain her father's permission, kept her to spend the day. The child was in and out of the kitchen twenty

times during the course of the afternoon. She was in the habit, indeed, of entering all the rooms; but when Mr. Meggat and our other lodgers were absent, my mother, fortunately, had been in the habit of locking their room doors, lest Sarah should disarrange their books and things.

Nelly's work was soon over, all our lodgers having gone that day to the country; so when she had cleaned up, she went to the drawer for the ribbon. We were all in our parlour—Sarah occupied with a picture-book that I had looked out for her—when Nelly appeared at the door.

"I beg your pardon, mem," she said, "but ye didna see a ribbon in one of the kitchen drawers?"

"No, Nelly, I did not," said my mother.

"I thought ye might hae put it some other place, or mistaen it for something else, mem," said Nelly, evidently disappointed by the answer.

"I am quite certain I did not, Nelly," said my mother; "but I will come and help you to look for it. Perhaps it has fallen behind the drawer," and she laid down her seam and went to the kitchen, for she had a great value for Nelly.

In a few minutes she returned.

“Sarah,” she said, “you were often in the kitchen to-day; did you see anything like a small paper parcel lying about?”

“No,” answered Sarah, apparently engrossed with her pictures.

“It’s very extraordinary,” said my mother; “Nelly is positive to have seen it in the drawer this morning.”

“Has there been any stranger in the kitchen, mother?” I asked.

“There’s not been a soul there to-day,” she answered, “except Mrs. Moffat’s lassie in the afternoon with the pennyworth of sweet milk. Nelly took her in to give her Mr. Meggat’s cream-can that she had left yesterday.”

“Can she have taken it?” I suggested.

“I cannot tell,” said my mother, reluctantly; “I never saw anything but honesty about the girl, and she has often been in the kitchen before,—besides, Nelly was there all the time.”

“But Nelly might turn her back for a moment, and then Lizzy Moffat might whip it out of the drawer, if it was open,” said Sarah, here glibly putting in her word.

“ Well,” said my mother, looking much annoyed, “ I must speak to Mrs. Moffat about it, for if the girl is a thief, it’s a duty to tell her mother. You’re quite sure, Sarah, that you never saw it ? ”

“ No, I never saw it,” said Sarah, boldly.

“ It’s really a most distressing thing,” continued my mother, sitting down after making a thorough search through the room, the only result of which was the disturbance of Archie’s books and papers ; “ and it is a serious matter to tell a decent woman that we suspect her daughter to be a thief ; besides, what proof have we that it was Lizzy ? ”

“ It was her—I’m sure it was just her,” said Sarah, eagerly.

“ Have you any reason for thinking so ? ” I asked, surprised by the child’s words and manner.

“ Oh ! I’m just sure it was her, that’s all,” answered Sarah, colouring.

“ But it’s not right to say so, Sarah,” said I, “ unless you have good grounds for it. Did any one ever tell you that Lizzy Moffat is a thief ? ”

“ Yes, they did, though,” replied Sarah ; but her voice shook somewhat, I noticed, and she did not meet my eyes.

I just then happened to look at Archie—he had been writing at the table till interrupted by my mother's search, and paying no attention to what was going on. He was now gazing fixedly at Sarah, and this caused me also to regard her more attentively. She grew very red, and was evidently uneasy under his examination.

"Mother," said Archie, pointing impressively to Sarah, "*she* has got it."

"I haven't," said Sarah, angrily.

"But I know you have," said Archie, pushing back his chair and rising; "give it up this moment."

"I never took it," said Sarah, running into a corner and beginning to cry.

"Archie, Archie!" said my mother, reprovingly. She thought him harsh.

"I tell you, mother, she has got it," said Archie, looking with strong disgust upon Sarah; "I have been watching her face for some minutes, and I am persuaded that if you search her you will find the ribbon."

Here followed a great outcry from Sarah. "I didn't take it—I tell you I didn't take it," she screamed.

My mother was distressed ; she could not believe what Archie so positively asserted ; no child could utter such falsehoods, fallow as the ground here had lain.

“Sarah, you surely cannot be telling lies ?” she said, anxiously.

No, Sarah would not confess ; the former outcry was still repeated, and even in a more excited key : “I didn’t take it—I tell you I didn’t take it.”

“Archie, you must be mistaken,” said my mother, apart to him.

“I tell you, mother, she has got it,” repeated Archie, shaking his head energetically at Sarah.

“It’s not possible,” said my mother ; but she became very pale.

“Look in the bosom of her frock,” said Archie ; “see how she keeps her hand there !”

But to do so was beyond my mother’s power. Sarah kicked, screamed, and struck fiercely at us when we attempted to approach her. She was like an infuriated wild animal when driven to bay ; her eyes glittered, and her skin, between anger and fear, was crimsoned to the very roots of her hair.

It was shocking to see a child in so excited a state. The noise was so great that it brought Nelly in alarm from the kitchen, and we all stood grouped round Sarah, looking anxiously at her.

“I cannot do it, Archie,” said my mother, who was trembling with agitation; “and besides, it’s not possible that a child of that age could tell such lies. Leave her alone, or she will be ill.”

I agreed with my mother that Archie must be wrong, and, like her, I was afraid for the child’s health. But Archie had more penetration than we. He said nothing more, and presently left the room, leaving Sarah still sobbing violently in her corner with the aspect of one unjustly accused, while we three regarded her with troubled faces, and vainly endeavoured to soothe her. Archie returned in a few minutes; his hat was in his hand.

“Well,” he said, addressing Sarah, who suddenly ceased her crying at sight of the hat, and became very still and watchful; “well, do you mean to confess yet?”

She did not answer, but she breathed quickly, and looked from the hat to his face with keen apprehension.

“Because if you do not,” continued Archie, “I mean to bring your father here, and we shall see if he can make you”—and he turned towards the door.

“No, no, no,” shrieked Sarah, beating the floor with her feet in the extremity of her terror, “no, no, no !”

“Did you take it ?”

Still she did not answer ; her eyes glanced from him to us, round the room, and then back to him irresolutely.

“I shall give you only one chance more,” said Archie, “and if you do not now confess, I shall have your father here in ten minutes. Sarah Braftsute, did you take the ribbon ?”

“Yes,” murmured the child.

“Give it to me !”

She put her hand into the bosom of her frock, and pulled out the crumpled blue ribbon ; but instead of giving it to him, she threw it spitefully upon the carpet. Archie picked it up and gave it to Nelly, who, I suppose, wished she had never bought it.

I shall never forget the expression of my mother’s

face, as for some moments she stood motionless, gazing on Sarah. If a tender lambkin had been suddenly transformed before her into a lion or tiger she could scarcely have appeared more dismayed ; she looked with actual dread on the child.

“Such wickedness, such hardened wickedness !” she ejaculated at length ; “and in a bairn only eight years old !” Then seizing her by the shoulders, my tender-hearted mother shook her heartily. “Sarah Braidfute,” she said, “how durst you steal that ribbon, and then accuse another of it ! Do you know what the Bible says about lying ?”

The child struggled out of my mother’s grasp, and then lifting up the corner of her pinafore, began plaiting it with her fingers, while she glanced stubbornly and defiantly through her dishevelled hair into my mother’s face.

“I believe the bairn is actually possessed,” said the latter, who had never met with such a child as Sarah before : “what are we to do with her, Archie ?”

“It’s the training at home, mother,” said he ; “and as you cannot alter that, you had better let her alone.”

“Sarah,” I said, taking her hand, and trying to speak gently—for shocked though I was, my heart was grieved for the motherless child—“Sarah, do you not know that you have done a very wicked and a very cruel thing?”

She drew her hand away and looked sulkily at me for a moment, but did not speak.

“We are sorry to find you capable of this, Sarah: are you not sorry and ashamed of yourself?”

She only pouted her lip, and tried to look as if she did not heed me.

“But what’s to be done about this, bairns?” said my mother, earnestly; “it cannot be allowed to pass.”

“You’ll not tell my father?” said Sarah, suddenly breaking down, and beginning to cry. The child’s training had been completely that of fear.

“I must tell him, Sarah; it would not be right to conceal it from him.”

“I’ll not go home; I’ll run away, then,” screamed Sarah.

“Do you hear the bairn? Archie and Matthew, do you hear the bairn?” exclaimed my mother, with uplifted hands.

"He'll thrash me—he'll thrash me with the big horsewhip," sobbed the child.

"Mother," said I, in a whisper, "is it possible that he would strike her with a whip?"

"I cannot tell, Matthew," she replied, in the same low key: "John Braifute is a severe man. But who can believe what the child says now? Sarah," she said aloud, "are you telling another lie? I am sure your father would never use you in that way."

"But he does, though," said Sarah, crying violently; "when he's angry he locks me into his own room, and then takes out the long whip and lashes me."

"I cannot believe it," said my mother, horror-struck.

"But I can believe it," muttered Archie.

"He thrashed me last Monday," said Sarah, quick to observe the effect which her words had produced, "and I've the marks yet on my legs."

"Let me see them," said my mother, who now doubted every statement Sarah made.

The child instantly sat down on the floor and pulled off her shoes and stockings, and sure enough,

there on her legs were the discoloured marks of several severe lashes.

“Eh me! eh me! the brute that he is!” cried Nelly, sinking on her knees beside the child, and gazing pitifully on the marks.

“If I had but the lashing of him!” exclaimed Archie, drawing in his breath and clenching his fists.

“Whisht, Nelly! whisht, bairns!” said my mother, in an admonitory voice, as she stooped down, and, with no ungentle hand, began to put on Sarah’s stockings again; “it’s not right to speak that way of her father before the bairn: it’s her duty to respect him.”

“Well, that’s true, mother,” said Archie; “but I don’t think I shall ever be so severe again to that child; such a mode of correction would make a fiend of me.”

“Will you promise never to steal again, Sarah, if I consent not to tell your father this time?” asked my mother.

Sarah was as ready to promise as she had been to lie. The most discouraging thing about the child was that this exposure seemed to cause her

little or no shame,—the fear of punishment alone moved her.

“I am afraid I am doing wrong in not telling him,” continued my mother, “but I cannot see my way clear. Remember, Sarah, that if ever I hear of your taking what does not belong to you, or of your telling lies, I shall have to let your father know about this. Sirs! to think she may be taken up for shop-lifting yet, for it may come to that. Bairn, are you in the habit of stealing ?”

As was to be expected, she was about to deny it.

“Take care, Sarah; you had better tell the truth,” I said.

“Whiles,” then said the child, and this time she hung down her head and looked somewhat ashamed.

“Sirs!” again ejaculated my mother; “and has your father ever found it out, bairn ?”

No, he had not, but Marget had, she told us. Marget often threatened to tell her father of this, and about her playing with Hetty Millar and Jessie Barlas, if she refused to do her errands. “Marget makes me work for her,” said the child,

who was still seated on the carpet, looking up with a precociously cunning expression into our faces, “and if I’m not for doing it, she makes believe to go ben to my father,—but I know she winna,” bursting into a laugh.

“Would it not be better for yourself, Sarah,” said I, “to be careful never to do anything that you would be afraid of your father hearing of?”

“Oh, but it’s so dull at home,” said the child, “and Marget winna let me into the kitchen when her friends come to see her. I ken what for,” she added, with a strange look for a child’s face: “she doesna want me to hear what they say about father; but I can hear it all in the pantry when I like.”

“Have you no story-books that you could read in the parlour, Sarah?” said I; for we gave her no encouragement to speak of these things.

“Father never gives me any,” said Sarah; “besides, Hetty and Jessie live on our stair, and are always wanting me to play with them.”

“Why does your father forbid you to play with them?” I asked. “Are they bad girls?”

“He says their fathers are seceders and schis-

matics," replied Sarah, looking up with a half-intelligent, half-bewildered, expression. She had to repeat the last word several times before we understood her, she pronounced it so ill. Archie and I burst into a laugh, but my mother was very grave about it. "It was grievous," she said, "to see such uncharitableness among professing Christians." And then she tried to impress upon Sarah's mind the duty of attending to her father's wishes.

"Oh, but I hate my father," said Sarah, heedlessly. We were shocked to hear the child say this; but as we sow, so we reap.

Sarah was at length sent home under the care of Nelly, and we were left to discuss what had happened in a very disturbed state of mind. My mother finally resolved to speak to our relative on the impropriety of leaving the child so much in the company of Marget; for Cousin Braidfute was the ruling elder in the congregation he belonged to, and was so energetic in looking after its concerns that he had no time for those of his own house. He had also become a town-councillor; and, as it was said, coveting the still higher honour of being

a bailie, he was most indefatigable in his attention to public business, and never lost an opportunity of arguing every question that came before the council board, to the annoyance of his less pugnacious colleagues.

CHAPTER VII.

MY COLLEGE FRIENDS.

I WAS now busy with my education. I cannot say that I made a brilliant figure at college, but I was plodding and persevering. Though every step I mounted in the ladder of learning was a great effort to me, I never lost what I had once acquired ; if I had not a quick and penetrating intellect, I had at least a retentive memory. Archie, too, was always ready to assist me ; and, upon the whole, I got through my first session creditably.

Of course I was thrown into the company of other lads at college, and had opportunities of forming friendships ; but I was ever slow in availing myself of such. I generally required the first advances to be made by others ; so, as I lacked both Archie's gay turn and good looks, few sought my society—at all events, none like my dear old

friend Adam. Indeed, I may as well confess that my nickname amongst my fellow-students was "sober Matthew," having reference to a certain old-fashioned formality and sobriety which they professed to discover in my demeanour.

There were only two lads with whom I was on terms of intimacy. They showed a liking for my company, and a little of this went a great way with me. They were from the Highlands, and rough-looking tykes they were, with the north-country accent in full perfection. They were, however, decent lads enough, although their up-bringing had been very different from mine—they having literally followed the plough till the ambition, so common among the Scottish peasantry, of seeing their sons ministers of the "kirk," had dawned upon their parents' minds. The lads were not related, but being from the same district, and both utter strangers to the town, they, from motives of economy, as well as for company, shared the same lodgings.

Our acquaintance commenced through some little attentions I paid to them in the loan of books, which the poor fellows could ill afford to

purchase ; they were my father's, who possessed every theological and classical work of merit of that day. I was sorry for the lads. Their uncouth appearance and evident poverty procured them the ridicule of the better-born and better-clad students, who, generally speaking, are a most unfeeling tribe. They were the laughing-stock of the classes. I saw that they felt this keenly, for they had all the irascibility and pride characteristic of their race ; and often did these boil over beneath the petty annoyances and boyish wit with which especially their younger fellow-students unweariedly assailed them. So little accustomed were they to civility, that mine at first was received suspiciously ; but once convinced that no covert insult was hidden under it, they met my advances in a friendly spirit. It was some time, however, before they had sufficient confidence in my good faith to admit me into their lodgings, or even to give me an inkling where they were situated, and I was careful to betray no curiosity on the subject. With my mother's consent, I invited them occasionally to our house of an evening, and undoubtedly it was her kindly, motherly reception

of them that finally induced them to throw off all reserve.

My first visit to their lodgings was rather embarrassing to me, for their pride was evidently up in arms and on the watch for some cause of offence. Their lodgings were mean enough, certainly. They were situated in the West Bow—now demolished—six stairs up, and such stairs! They were so steep and narrow that persons could not pass each other except at the small landing-places on each floor, and these consisted merely of a somewhat broader step. There were some narrow apertures in the outer wall for admitting air and light, but little of either found entrance. Add to this, that the staircase, being rarely cleaned, though much frequented, was squalid and filthy in the extreme. I had a great dread of it; and when I occasionally engaged to visit my friends in the evening—for I could not always give them complete possession of a book we mutually needed, but we had to study it together—it was on the understanding that Bob Galbraith (Big Bob we used to call him), who was a giant in size and strength, should protect me to the bottom.

The tenement was thickly peopled, and strangely diversified were the occupations of its inhabitants ; cobblers and the humblest class of seamstresses, however, most abounded. My friends' landlady was a Widow McLeary, who, besides letting lodgings, maintained herself by making clothes for the dead,—a signboard to that effect being projected from one of the windows, for the information of the public.

Poor Big Bob ! what an ill-will he had to that sign, being prone to superstitious fancies, like most of his race ; and often did he express the desire that some windy night he might have the satisfaction of hearing it torn from its fastenings and shivered on the street below. But many a year after Bob Galbraith and Malcolm Campbell had quitted the lodgings did Widow McLeary's doleful signboard maintain its position high up beneath the garrets of the West Bow.

In this uninviting domicile they rented one small room, containing a truckle-bed, but with little else in the way of furniture ; and for this accommodation, and for the privilege of occasionally pursuing

their studies at Mrs. McLeary's fireside, they paid eighteen-pence in the week.

Our house and manner of living were plain and simple, for we were compelled to practise strict economy ; but this was not apparent to these lads, to whom ordinary comforts were luxuries. There was a great contrast, of course, between our clean orderly home and their sordid lodging, and I generally found them more or less disposed to be jealous and *touchy*, and full of those sharp proverbial sayings with which Scotland abounds, intended to humble my pride, after spending an evening with us. Poor fellows ! the pride was all on their side. It was doubtless a keen mortification to those poor proud lads, who were anxious to make a creditable appearance before others for the honour of the Highlands, when I inadvertently looked in on them one morning and found them at breakfast, consisting of one large wooden bowlful of thick oatmeal-porridge without milk, but with a lump of salted butter in the middle for *kitchen* (relish). They were evidently keenly appetised, having just returned from the morning class, where I had not succeeded in speaking to them, for their

horn spoons were passing rapidly between the dish and their mouths when I entered their room. They received me ungraciously enough, so I discharged my errand as quickly as possible, and took care to time my visits better afterwards.

It was not always easy to bear with them patiently, but then I sincerely pitied the lads and their friendless condition in Edinburgh. My mother, too, would say to me when I was feeling chafed by any unreasonable exhibition of temper on their part, "Matthew, my dear, let us bear with the pride that springs from poverty." I did bear with it, and it was not my fault that our friendship, at least for that session, came to an abrupt conclusion.

They had promised to call on me one evening, and my mother kindly proposed to detain them to supper, and had provided a bunch of savoury Finnan haddies for their entertainment. Just about the hour when I expected them, she recollected an order which she had forgotten to give in the afternoon, and as the shop was in the neighbourhood I offered to deliver it, as Nelly was busy. Before leaving the house I told the latter that if the gentlemen from the Bow—so I

called them in the uprightness of my heart, and not in mockery—should arrive ere I returned, she was to explain the cause of my absence and ask them to wait. I was back in about ten minutes, and was surprised to learn that they had come in the interval, but had refused to enter.

“And 'deed I think, Mr. Matthew, begging your pardon,” said Nelly, whose good temper seemed unusually ruffled, “that neither o' them is very right in the head. I just gied them your message in your ain words—for I aye like to be particular—that the twa gentlemen frae the Bow (though weel-a-wat, there's little gentlemen about them) were to come in and wait till such time as you came back, when they took to fighting on me like fish-wives—na, as to that, Jean Jaup's tongue is naething to theirs—and the big ane said that you were an insolent, jeering fallow, but that he would be upsides with you yet for it. And awa' doon the stair they ran, and I wonder you didna meet them at the foot o' it.”

Though we questioned and cross-questioned Nelly, none of us could make anything of it. But I did not doubt of getting an explanation

at the morning class, and of being able to disabuse their minds of any wrong impression; at the same time I was growing seriously weary of these causeless alternations of mood. They, however, carefully avoided giving me an opportunity. Moreover, they both looked, but especially Big Bob, so scowling and wrathful that I had not courage to follow them to their lodgings. We met, of course, every day at the classes, but their displeasure with me underwent no abatement. Nay, they waxed more and more outrageous, as if my very patience under this treatment provoked them—even putting themselves in my way on the streets, that by their gestures and looks—I knew not what they said, for they jabbered to each other in Gaelic—they might testify their contempt for me. Any one that has seen an angry Highlander snuffing up the air can imagine it. I grew so nervous from this state of things, that at last I would slink up any close or backway to avoid them. My father's books, which I had lent them, they returned without the civility of thanks, thrusting them into Nelly's hands when she opened the door at their knock, and then

running down the stairs so quickly as to escape the torrent of indignant words which she sent after them. I found a half-crown put up along with the books—intended, I supposed, as payment for the use of them—which, of course, I sent back by a sure hand to their lodgings. The session was at its close, and I gave up all expectation of an explanation. The thing, however, caused me some pain, for I have been ever constant in my friendships, though slow to form them. They finally departed for their distant homes, to prosecute their studies alternately with labouring on their fathers' small and unproductive farms till the next session of college arrived ; and I continued in utter ignorance of the nature of my offence.

The harvest of that year was exceptionally good in the Highlands. Friends were found willing to open their *stockings* (an old stocking is a common purse in the north) to help them, and when the two students returned to Edinburgh they could afford better lodgings than Mrs. McLeary's ; their outward man was also improved, and, perhaps owing to the soothing influence of these changes, they were less touchy and irascible in temper.

We met at the first as strangers; but in a few days they began to feel their way to a renewal of intercourse; and perceiving this, I met them half-way, being curious to know what excuse they could make for their past behaviour, at the same time resolving to be very prudent in all my future dealings with them.

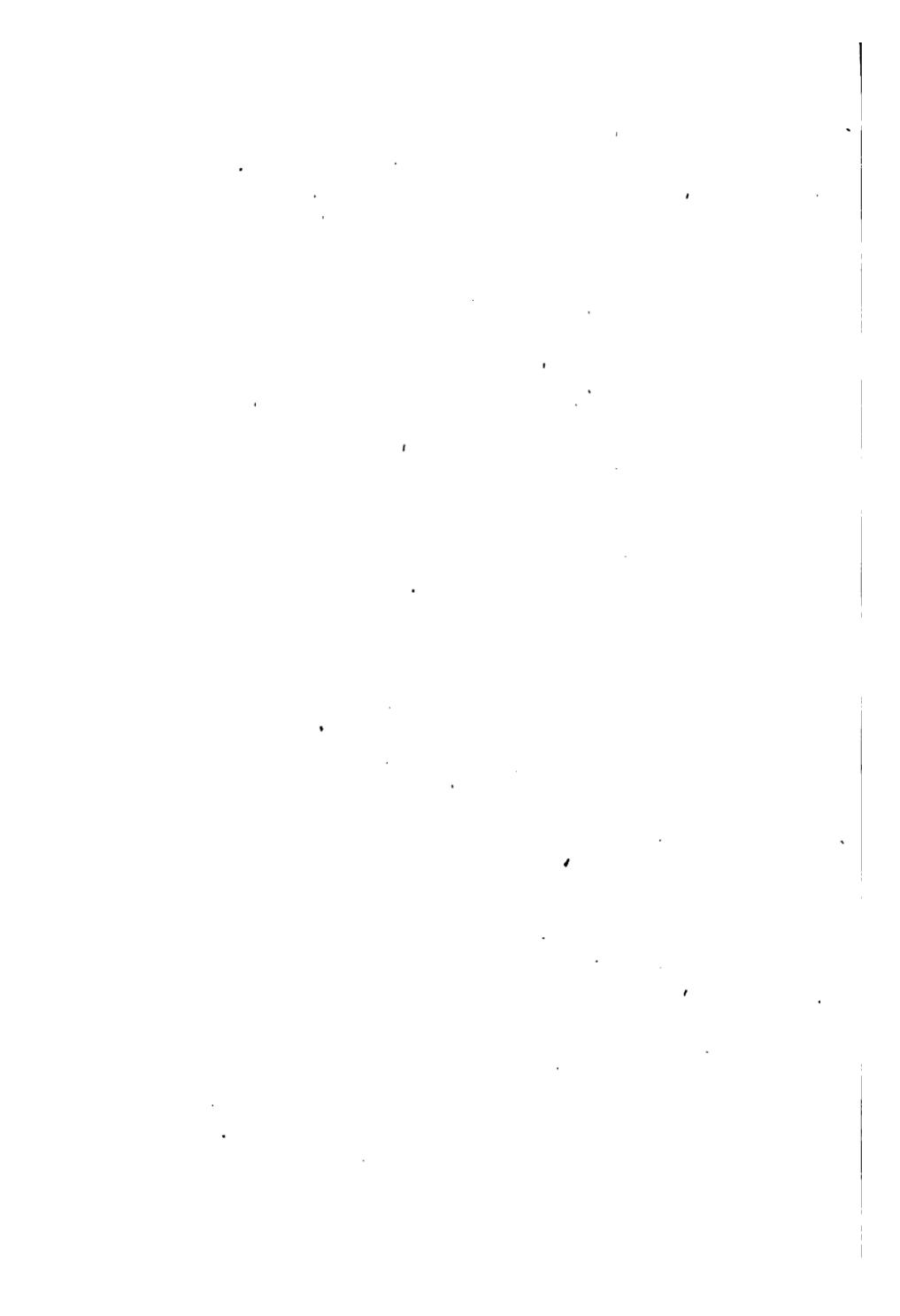
And now came the explanation of the riddle. Will it be believed that my offence entirely consisted in the unfortunate appellation which I had innocently put into Nelly's mouth? Gentility, indeed, had little to do with the locality of the "Bow"; and my presumed bad jest was the sole cause of the burst of rage which had so scandalised Nelly, and of their outrageous conduct towards me during the last month of the session. Truly, Highlanders are kittle cattle to deal with, and need wary approaching to!

I lost sight of them after this session; circumstances having induced them to continue their studies at Glasgow College. I believe they hoped to get pupils there, which their strong north-country accent prevented in Edinburgh. I often thought of them, however, and wondered how they

were getting on, especially Big Bob, who had many eccentricities. I knew not whether he were alive or dead till, years after our separation, I chanced to hear him preach in a chapel of ease in the west. I recognised him the moment he entered the pulpit; and truly he rowted that day like one of his own Highland stirk, much to the edification of the deaf old wives in their grey duffle cloaks and white caps, in the table seat, who appeared to think that they had lighted on a perfect Boanerges.

The church was vacant, and he was preaching as a candidate before the congregation. I waited to speak to him at the close of the service, and he greeted me with great heartiness. Bob had spruced up wonderfully, and had now a good black coat on his back. I learned from him that Malcolm Campbell had emigrated with his relations to Canada, and now had a kirk and Gaelic congregation in the backwoods, and that he himself, if at present unsuccessful, meant to follow his example. And as Bob was unsuccessful, probably by this time he has preached many a sermon in his native Gaelic in the remote regions of the far west.

I must not omit to state that Bob's preaching, judging from the specimen which I heard, was both earnest and evangelical, and not devoid of a certain rugged eloquence.



CHAPTER VIII.

COUSIN BRAIDFUTE TAKES US BY SURPRISE.

IT was Cousin Braifute's unvarying habit to pay us a weekly visit in the evening, and of this inquisitorial visit we stood in great dread. But we had taken the yoke upon us when we consulted him at the beginning ; and now, though it galled and oppressed us, we could not shake it off. Archie never hesitated to check his meddling when present, but he generally contrived to have some engagement from home when we expected our relative, and, indeed, his absence was rather a relief to my mother and me.

Thursday evenings came at last to be known in the family as "Cousin Braifute's nights," for punctual to six o'clock on that evening of the week came his knock on the door—a sound which always discomposed me, though I was expecting it. He liked to be waited on ; and my poor

mother and I—I hope it was not great hypocrisy—were on the watch to meet him in the lobby, relieve him of his hat and stick, and huge brown great-coat if it was winter, and then usher him with all assiduity into the parlour, where establishing himself in the easy-chair by the fireside, he forthwith commenced a strict investigation of all the events of the past week. There was no evading Cousin Braidsute's point-blank questions; and when he took his departure at half-past nine, after officiating at family worship, he had made himself acquainted not only with every incident that had happened in the household since his previous visit, but with almost every item of our weekly expenditure.

He was seldom satisfied with my mother's management, which he freely criticised; and it very rarely happened that he did not leave her low-spirited and nervous. I am sure our way of living was frugal enough, our only superfluities being occasioned by Mr. Braidsute himself, who had a sweet tooth, as it is called. But my mother was too well-bred and hospitable to hint at such an explanation. He was offended at Archie's

frequent absences, though more at ease without him. Archie could not endure the man ; besides, he was a young man now, and though the most dutiful of sons, had a will of his own. It was cruel of Cousin Braidfute to insinuate to my mother that Archie was getting into improper company, and falling into bad habits, because he met him so seldom at home. It made her very unhappy till we ascertained that Cousin Braidfute had no foundation for such an assertion. But the man was of a hard, coarse nature. He persisted in regarding Mr. Meggat as a hypocrite, only because he was universally courteous.

Poor little Mr. Meggat ! I think I still see him unwillingly drawn into one of those interminable arguments in which Cousin Braidfute's soul delighted. Illiterate and self-sufficient, it was useless to quote authorities against Mr. Braidfute ; he snapped his fingers, as he himself expressed it—suiting the action to the words—at all such. Mr. Meggat's look of painful endurance and rueful politeness, while his opponent sneered at his views, ridiculed his logic, and finally—for who could resist such force of lungs ?—silenced if he did not

convince him, is still fresh in my mind. Mr. Meggat had a nervous dread of Cousin Braidfute's mode of enlightening. Nothing, I believe, but the most sincere regard for us kept him in a family where he was exposed to such exhausting attacks, for much as Cousin Braidfute professed to despise him, he seldom paid us a visit without sending to request his company. Perhaps Mr. Braidfute relished an adversary who he knew could not turn against him his own weapons of scorn and vituperation. Mr. Meggat used to steal away to his own room after Cousin Braidfute had left us, with a weary, dejected air, as if he required perfect solitude and silence to recruit his worn-out spirits. And, indeed, when the house-door closed upon our relative, we each felt as if a burden had been suddenly lifted from the atmosphere, and that we could breathe more freely.

We saw less of Sarah now. Her father had had the sense to take my mother's advice, and had placed her as a day boarder in a respectable school. I occasionally called at his house to avoid giving offence, as neither my mother nor Archie would enter it. Margaret was still as absolute as ever;

but latterly it struck me that there was more appearance of harmony in the household. Cousin Braidfute was more like himself, while Marget seemed really solicitous to please him. But these signs had no peculiar significance in my eyes.

However, as the spring wore on, we all observed an alteration in Cousin Braidfute, though we were puzzled to discover in what it consisted. After various conjectures, we decided that he must have changed his tailor, for his look was certainly jauntier, as well as more self-conscious, than it used to be. But this was not all ; he was also growing jocular and facetious—he who had frowned upon innocent mirth, and had counted laughter as the “crackling of thorns under a pot,”—though his jocularity was like his own figure, somewhat heavy and uncouth. Nay, what was fully as strange, he was becoming liberal, for he occasionally brought us a pound of carvies (carroways) in his pocket for tea. He had never before spent a sixpence on us, though we had been nearly two years in Edinburgh, so that his generosity took us by surprise. There were other changes manifest to my mother’s experienced

eye, but which for the present she kept to herself.

We only feared this state of things was too good to last. Mr. Meggat was delighted to find that Mr. Braidfute, instead of tackling him with arguments on abstruse points of theology, was now more inclined to discuss lighter topics, such as rallying him on his obstinate bachelorhood. Cousin Braidfute was grimly facetious on this subject, while Mr. Meggat enjoyed himself thoroughly, rubbing his hands through each other, and smiling all round, as was his habit when pleased. As weeks wore on, we grew so accustomed to the change that at last we found ourselves, to our own amazement, taking the liberty of bantering Cousin Braidfute in return, who, instead of resenting, seemed rather to relish it. It was altogether so extraordinary that, moved by a common impulse, we began to talk of it one night after both he and Mr. Meggat had left us. Archie had remained at home that evening.

“Bairns,” said my mother, looking up from her seam with a smile, after listening to our remarks for some minutes, “that man is going to be married.”

“Married!” we both exclaimed in astonishment, “it’s not possible.”

My mother only shook her head with another smile.

“But how can he marry any one without Marget’s consent?” said I; “and she will never yield to have a mistress put over her.”

“I cannot tell how it will be arranged,” replied my mother, “but you will hear about his marriage one of these days, or I have no skill.”

Her confidence made some impression upon us. That he needed a wife was certain; but how such a change of domestic arrangements could take place amicably we could not imagine. We knew little or nothing of the families with whom Cousin Braidfute was acquainted, so our suspicions could fix on no individual. But Archie hoped that if my mother was correct in her prognostications, the lady might turn out to be a certain tall, gaunt, but well *tochered* (dowried), middle-aged spinster belonging to his own congregation, and notorious in the neighbourhood for the severity of her domestic rule. We scarcely expected, however, that my mother would prove a true prophet.

On the Wednesday evening of the following week I took a walk with Mr. Meggat. On our return he went into his own parlour and I into ours. I found my mother alone there with an open letter in her hand, and with a face so expressive of dismay that I anxiously inquired if there was any bad news. She looked at me with such an absent and bewildered air in answer to my question, that I saw she had not understood it. I therefore repeated it with increased uneasiness, fearing that my beloved friend Adam Bowman, with whom I had never ceased to correspond, was dead, and that she was afraid to tell me of it. This in some measure restored her faculties. “Read it, Matthew—read it!” she answered, holding out the letter to me; and then, clasping her hands expressively together, she leaned back in her chair as if incapable as yet of further speech. I glanced hastily at the signature, for it was a long, closely-written epistle.

“Cousin Braidfute!” I exclaimed, much relieved.

“The idiot!—the old donnart, absurd idiot!” burst from my mother’s usually meek lips when I pronounced the name.

“Who is an idiot, mother?” I asked, in perplexity.

“To propose—to propose to marry his own servant-lass!” she continued, paying no attention to my interruption. “And such a servant—an impudent, bold quean! and above all to expect me—*me* to countenance him in such a disgraceful thing!” And my mother, looking more angry than I had ever seen her, moved nervously in her chair, and shook out the folds of her black bombazine gown with a very trembling hand.

The light suddenly broke upon me. “Mother, you don’t mean,” said I, “you cannot mean that Cousin Braidfute is going to marry—Marget?” I felt almost ashamed to give utterance to the idea.

“It’s even a melancholy truth, Matthew. Ay you may well stare! I used to be sorry for the ill opinion your poor father had of him, and sometimes thought he judged him over hardly; but it seems now that he knew him best. To go and disgrace himself and his friends by marrying that unprincipled woman! and he an office-bearer that should be an example to others, besides being a

man well up in years. But there's no fools like old fools."

I was lost in amazement, and could only listen to her.

"He couldn't tell me by word of mouth—I am glad he has some sense of shame left—but must needs write me that long nonsensical letter about it," continued my mother, her indignation suffering no abatement. "And to think of that ill bairn Sarah, with such a step-mother, Matthew!—my heart is sore about her. Little did I guess the whole meaning of the man's glegness this while past."

"It is much to be deplored," was all that I could think of to say.

"Deplored! it's perfectly heart-breaking," said my good mother, the tears running down her cheeks as she thought of Sarah; "but he will surely be punished for it yet; that woman will make both him and the bairn miserable. And then the money her mother had is secured to him and not to Sarah, as it should have been. I shouldn't wonder if she never gets a penny of it. If Marget was domineering as a servant, she will be worse as a wife. But

that's not all, Matthew. What—what do you think he has the assurance to ask?"

I shook my head in utter uncertainty.

"That you and Archie and I should come to the wedding!" said my mother in a fresh burst of indignation, as if this proposal was to her the cope-stone and crowning point of the whole offence, looking me full in the face as if to see its effect upon me,—"that we, as his relations, should stand by him at this time. But John Braidfute is much mistaken if he expects to whilly-wha me into sanctioning his folly. But read the letter, Matthew, my dear, and let me be quiet for awhile, for this news has quite upset me."

It was truly a strange production, the letter: at once blustering and cringing; but the latter tone prevailed, as if Cousin Braidfute secretly felt somewhat ashamed of the step he was taking. Now he deprecated my mother's displeasure; now he argued on the prudence of his conduct,—Marget knew his ways, and though a little unreasonable in her temper at times, had always had his interest at heart: she would make him a more thrifty wife than one in his own station. And he hoped—he

might almost say he believed—that she was a woman who feared the Lord. And she was much attached to Sarah—indeed, it was altogether on Sarah's account that he thought of marrying again. He reckoned, therefore, on his cousin being superior to the foolish prejudices of the world on this subject, and on her coming and bringing her sons with her to the wedding, especially as we were almost his only blood relations in Edinburgh, and our absence on such an occasion would be considered a slight.

“The short and the long of it, Matthew,” said my mother, when I had finished the letter, “is that the man was determined to marry again; and as he hadn't the courage to rid himself of that woman, he settled to make her his wife. Sarah's account, forsooth! as if he ever thought of the bairn in the matter. Wait till his new wife has a family of her own, and we'll see what kind of home there will be for Sarah in her father's house!”

I must not forget to mention that Cousin Braidsute drew largely from the Scriptures, especially from the historical books of the Old Testament, in defence of unequal marriages; and on this my mother was very severe, declaring it rank pre-

sumption and a misapplication of Holy Writ. "Boaz may have married a Moabitess, and King Ahasuerus a poor Jewess," she said, "but what has that to do with an old fool of a retired linendraper marrying his own ill-conditioned, middle-aged servant-lass in the old town of Edinburgh?"

I had scarcely recovered from my surprise when Archie came home, whose merriment on hearing the news knew no bounds. He threw himself on the sofa, and laughed till his eyes ran over, and till my mother was somewhat displeased of his making a jest of such a "misfortune." But Archie insisted that it was none, and that we ought to be grateful to Marget for marrying "Bogie," as he called our relative.

"We shall have no 'Thursday nights' now, mother," he said, smiling merrily in her face,— "and you and Matt may venture to take your own way."

But my mother was not to be mollified by this view of the subject; she could not get over the disgrace of the proposed connection, "a man marrying his own servant-lass." And, indeed, I have often since observed that women—good

women too—are generally more severe than men in judging such unequal marriages. But of course, inequality of station was not my mother's only objection.

CHAPTER IX.

COUSIN BRAIDFUTE'S WEDDING.

THE marriage was to take place in a fortnight. Archie was extremely desirous to be present, declaring that he would not miss the sight upon any account; but for almost the first time in his life he had great difficulty in obtaining his mother's consent, and notwithstanding his threat, I knew that he would not go without it. For several days it seemed uncertain which would have to yield to the other; but, as I fully expected, Archie's stronger will carried the day. My mother at last, reluctantly enough, gave way to the pressure put upon her, and consented 'that we might go; as to herself, she remained firm.

"You are but thoughtless laddies after all," she said, "and nobody will take much notice of what you do; and doubtless a young colt should have its fling."

So after keeping Cousin Braidsute waiting nearly a week for his answer, during which he had omitted his usual visit, Archie wrote a civil note of acceptance for himself and me, declining the invitation for my mother, who would not even send her compliments. Mr. Meggat was also invited and meant to go.

Cousin Braidsute's habitation was near the West Cross Causeway, and overlooked the churchyard in that locality. "It was a fit look-out for such a grim kill-joy of a man," Archie often said. The flat he occupied, and which I rather think belonged to himself, was on the third story. It was the best in the whole land; for the higher up, the more aristocratic the domicile, was the opinion of the old Edinburgh gentry; and Cousin Braidsute's house had once been the town lodging of a countess.

I used to wonder how she contrived to give grand assemblies and such-like entertainments in those small low-roofed rooms, which the class of tradespeople think hardly good enough for their accommodation in these days. I liked to picture the dusky lobby and parlours crowded with gallant-

looking gentlemen with long curled hair hanging on their shoulders, rich lace cravats and ruffles at their bosoms and wrists, and with swords at their sides ; and with beautiful stately ladies rustling in velvets and brocades, adorned with family jewels—our present Scottish nobility's and gentry's great-great-grandparents, whose portraits may be seen on the walls of every old castle and mansion throughout the country. Ah me ! when I look up at them there, gazing down with their lifelike eyes into mine, it always makes me *erie* to remember that all that grandeur, and comeliness, and pride have been in the grave with the worm for a hundred years or more. I like to hear their histories from some garrulous old family servant—to be told what Lady Jeans, and Betties, and Marjories among them helped to build up other noble houses, where their later portraits represent them as comely matrons, or dignified, silvery-haired, ancient dames ; and what others faded away, and were laid beside their ancestors in the gloomy family vault in the bloom and freshness of their youth. These fierce old barons and lairds also, glaring down grimly in suits of armour,

strong-willed, and strong-handed, I like to trace their bold features and expression, modified by more peaceful times and intellectual development, down through ermined judges, soldiers, sailors, and statesmen, some of whose names may be familiar to every school-boy throughout the kingdom. What a stir they all made once, and how quiet they are now !

Cousin Braidfute's house was, of course, somewhat ancient. Indeed, it was considered as no longer a fitting residence even for professional men, who by this time were zealously setting their faces towards the rapidly increasing streets and squares of the new town. It was in pretty good order, though the floors were beginning to yield a little from age. There was a decided slope from the door to the centre of each room, and a visitor unaware of this peculiarity was liable to lose his balance, and make his entrance with more haste than propriety,—as happened to me on my first visit. The furniture, though of very solid old mahogany, was in consequence more unsteady than quite suited comfort; in particular, the sofa had always one of its front castors suspended in

the air, and had to be propped up by a battered snuff mull. The bedsteads in the sleeping-rooms had a similar tottering tendency, especially the one in Cousin Braidfute's own chamber—a gloomy, venerable four-poster, whose heavy drapery of dark-green reminded one involuntarily of the festoons about a hearse.

The house, however, though dull and uninviting as a home, was sufficiently furnished, and contained some things of value, such as cupboards filled with curious old china, which had once been his mother's pride; and some articles of Indian manufacture brought from abroad by her younger son, whose vessel finally went down in the deep sea with all her crew; at least, so it was conjectured, for the ocean reveals no secrets.

"Ah, Matthew," my mother once said to me when I alluded to these rarities, "many a tear has dropped upon them, to my knowledge."

There was no scarcity of anything but books in Cousin Braidfute's house. A very few lay on the top of an antique bureau in the smaller parlour; the never-failing and excellent Matthew Henry's *Commentary* forming the foundation, on which

were piled the smaller books till an apex was attained. On examining some of the latter, I no longer marvelled from what spring Cousin Braidfute drew his spiritual nutriment and acquired his peculiar phraseology ; for, though not altogether destitute of merit, their theology was poor and narrow, and their style deformed with extravagant metaphors and mannerisms.

The house contained two parlours, but one of them was of very small dimensions. It was the ordinary sitting-room, Cousin Braidfute only using the larger room when he had company, which was rather a rare occurrence.

The wedding-day arrived without our having again seen or heard from Cousin Braidfute. Seven o'clock in the evening was the hour appointed, and it was just striking on the nearest church clock when Mr. Meggat and we began to ascend the common stair, which had been freshly caumstoned (washed with pipe-clay) in honour of the occasion during the afternoon. The neighbouring bairns, however, a cluster of whom were now gathered round the entry to see the wedding company arrive, had made a point of marking the

lower steps with feet fresh from paddling in the dirty kennel as soon as the officiating lass had turned her back.

The house-door was opened for us by the new servant who now filled the bride's vacated place, and who was flaunting in white ribbons and a large-patterned cotton-print gown. I suppose she was confused either with the newness of her service, or with the excitement of the wedding, and had forgot her instructions, for as she was about to usher us into the little parlour, I distinctly heard a voice whisper shrilly through the chink of a neighbouring door, "The ither room, canna ye, ye silly tawpie." I just glanced with the tail of my eye in the direction of the sound, and by the light of two candles on the lobby table I got a momentary glimpse of the bride's face peering out to see who had arrived; but I took no notice, and followed Mr. Meggat and Archie into the right apartment.

We were the first arrived of the company. Cousin Braidfute was standing on the hearthrug, with his back to the fireplace, when we entered. He came forward to receive us with a great ap-

pearance of heartiness, but he was evidently embarrassed and ill at ease; nor had I ever seen him look so unprepossessing. And somehow his new suit of glossy black—for Cousin Braidfute, being an elder of the kirk, considered it incumbent on him to be always dressed in sables—made one think of a funeral. Sarah was sitting in a window the farthest removed from her father, and looking so sulky as to warrant my suspicion that our entrance had interrupted a lecture.

We were immediately followed by a Mr. Blackadder and his wife, a big red-faced vulgar couple, whom I had once before met here. Mr. Blackadder had a leading haberdashery shop in town, and was one of those forward, jocular, talkative sort of men, very popular among the lower classes, but utterly insufferable to people of education and refined feeling. He broke into a hoarse laugh as he entered the room, slapped Cousin Braidfute energetically on the back to express his congratulations, who smiled rather sheepishly in return, and on being introduced to Mr. Meggat began instantly to rally him with all the freedom of old acquaintance. Other company arriving in

quick succession, relieved us from him for a time. Some of these evidently belonged to the bride's side, looked uncomfortable and awkward, and did not mix with the other guests, but kept together at the lower end of the room.

Cousin Braidfute's friends, I observed, eagerly scanned the rest of the company as soon as they had shaken hands with him, and seemed relieved on seeing the Blackadders and us. Next came the best man, a grey-haired, melancholy-looking preacher, with whom Mr. Meggat appeared well acquainted, for they withdrew into a corner immediately, from whence the former emerged only when his services came to be in requisition. Last of all arrived the minister, whose greeting of Cousin Braidfute, I fancied, was somewhat dry and formal.

The wedding party being all assembled, Mr. Blackadder, as a married man and the most important person in the company, was delegated to fetch the bride. I could detect various winks and nudges of the elbow pass between some of the guests as he departed on this errand, and there was an eager turning of heads towards the door

when the sound of his feet was heard returning through the lobby. Mrs. Marget did not keep her bridegroom long waiting for her. She came in demurely leaning on Mr. Blackadder's arm, who led her pompously to the top of the room. Her wedding gown was of crimson satin, bought, as we were informed further on in the evening, in Mr. Blackadder's shop, and she had a world of gum-flowers and sal-lals in her cap. A massive gold chain hung over her ample bust, and a watch of the same metal glittered at her waist. They had belonged to Sarah's mother, we afterwards learned, and should in justice have been kept for her child, but the bride coveted them. She was not an ill-looking woman of her years, rather comely indeed, but with a bold, hard expression of countenance. A tall, raw-boned female of about her own age followed her as bridesmaid. They arranged themselves; the minister gravely took his place in front of them, and the ceremony began.

Poor Cousin Braifute! I pitied him as he stood there before the minister, a nervous uneasy man, vowing away his liberty for the sake of that evil-

conditioned woman by his side, who now looked as if butter would not melt in her mouth, though I had so recently heard her snarl at the poor servant-lass. The lass was now keeking in at the door, and marvelling, I have little doubt, in her own mind if she should ever have the luck to get a master to marry her ; though I daresay the simple creature hoped, if it did happen, that he might not be such a black-browed, grawsome carle as the present bridegroom.

The marriage ceremony did not occupy much time ; but there was an awkward delay at the most important part of it, caused by the difficulty in removing the bride's glove, which was too tight for her coarse red hand, and which eventually tore up the middle. I thought the minister was rather more particular than usual in enforcing the duties of a wife, especially those of submission to and reverence for her husband, upon Mrs. Marget. She made a deep beck when her promise to discharge them was claimed, whereupon Archie gave me such an energetic nip in the fleshy part of my arm, that I nearly cried out with the anguish of it. I observed Mr. and Mrs. Blackadder exchange

a significant grin ; doubtless all present had their own thoughts on the subject.

The minister took his leave immediately after the ceremony, steadily declining to stay to supper, to Cousin Braidfute's evident mortification. The bride was placed in state in an arm-chair beside the fireplace ; and there she sat with her hands crossed mincingly—the ungloved one undermost—on her ample lap, tittering, and affecting to cast down her eyes from modesty, at Mr. Blackadder's broad jokes, yet at the same time fully cognizant, I could perceive, of all that was going on in the room, and especially of the servant-lass peeping in now and then at the door.

At length it was intimated to the company that the room must be cleared on account of the supper, which was to be served there. The females, with the exception of the bride and bridesmaid, who remained behind to superintend, were conducted to the best bedroom, while the men took possession of the little parlour. I was the last in the procession, and was just quitting the room when I was detained by a gracious signal from the bride.

“Mr. Matthew,” she whispered, “there’s to be a braw fat turkey, with plenty o’ stuffing, at the head o’ the table. I’ll see that ye get a gude slice o’t.”

I was somewhat surprised at this extending of the olive branch to me, which, I suppose, arose from my occasional visits to the house, and my care never to make or meddle there. I thanked her civilly, and followed the others, after seeing her and her friend begin to tuck up their skirts in preparation for the arranging of the supper, the savoury smell of which was now diffused through the house.

I found the little parlour so full that I had to stand in the doorway, which being in the darkest part of the lobby, dusky even during the day, as it was lighted from the staircase through some panes of glass above the house-door, and at this hour only by the flickering candles on the table, enabled me, unobserved, to witness many of the details of the forthcoming banquet, and also to overhear divers angry attacks by the bride and bridesmaid on the poor frightened servant-woman. These brought to my mind Solomon’s words, “For four

things," saith the wise king, "the earth is disquieted," and one of them is "a servant when (she) reigneth."

The poor woman naturally got bewildered in the end, with this flying; she had made more than one blunder already; but at last, as she was carrying a pie along the lobby which a baker's boy had just delivered at the door, what did the unfortunate creature do—perhaps something had tripped her foot—but let it fall out of her hands, and then stand still in her consternation, and skirl, "Eh, sirs! eh, sirs!" And then out bolted the new Mrs. Braifute and her friend from the supper-room, and as the bride could not see me in my dark corner, where a great lumbering eight-day clock made a convenient screen between us, she shook her fist in the woman's face, and actually swore an oath at her, though in a low voice that the company might not hear. Fortunately the pie had tumbled on a sheepskin mat, and in appearance was not much the worse; but the dish was cracked, and most of the gravy ran out.

This discovery angered the bride still more, and both she and her friend looked as if they could

scarcely keep their hands off the terrified cause of the mischance. They pushed her hither and thither between them. "Stand oot o' my road, ye born idiot!" hissed Mrs. Braidfute through her teeth; and "What for are ye dunshin' against me, ye jaud?" shrewishly whispered the bridesmaid, as the girl in starting back from the one came into contact with the other. And when the precious pair carried off the pie to the kitchen, leaving her to wipe up the spilt gravy, I was not surprised to see the simple creature shake her head, and turn up her eyes in piteous fashion, while she ejaculated, "Hech, sirs!" three times over, as if in sore distress, adding, "If my mither's hoose wasna in Fife, wi' the Frith between us, I wouldna bide the nicht here."

It was nine o'clock before the supper was served, and even Mr. Blackadder's jokes had begun to flag from the delay. Cousin Braidfute and his best man, that unhappy-looking Mr. Souter, had, however, got into a disputation which promised, but for the supper, to engage them till midnight. At length the ladies were relieved from their confinement in the bedroom, and we were summoned to

join them by John McKinlay, the publican, who was in the habit of waiting dinners and suppers, and who had arrived just after the accident to the pie. John had a spice of drollery about him ; and I have no doubt entertained his customers during the next few days with what he saw and heard that night, for the servant girl's face was sorely flushed when she helped him to wait the table ; and John wasn't one to want knowledge from shyness at putting questions.

We found the bride already seated in an arm-chair at the head of the table, all smiles and graciousness ; but truly I could not forget the oath I had heard from her lips, nor the scene I had witnessed a short time before. It was some minutes before we were all accommodated at the table ; John and the lass having to bring chairs from the other parlour and the bedrooms for some of the guests, John carrying two at a time, and the woman one. Mr. Blackadder was seated in the place of honour at the bride's right hand ; and she rather ostentatiously made room for Sarah on her left. Mr. Meggat was requested to ask the blessing. No expense had been spared on the supper

—the bride, no doubt, being determined that everything should be handsome on her wedding-day; and partaking of the good cheer liberally herself.

Cousin Braidfute's was the doucest end of the table, some of the guests there being men of his own stamp; though when the eatables were cleared away, and the toddy tumblers introduced, even a grim sort of jollity was established there. The bridegroom, drilled probably by the bride beforehand, did not venture to object when a song was proposed by Mr. Blackadder; perhaps he did not like to oppose any wish expressed by that gentleman. I was, however, much astonished at it, seeing that Cousin Braidfute had so severely condemned my reading of profane poetry, and I made a private memorandum of it in my mind to serve me on occasion. We had speeches also: one from Mr. Blackadder, full of puns and coarse jokes, which provoked much laughter from the bride's friends, on proposing the health of the newly-married couple, which Cousin Braidfute had the sense to acknowledge in as few words as possible. We had one too from Mr. Meggat, whose

toast was "The Ladies." I afterwards congratulated him on the neatness and point of his speech, when he ingenuously confessed that he had studied and committed it to memory some days before. But Archie came out wonderfully in the way of oratory; and, indeed, I was amazed at the versatility of talent he displayed that night, so that he quite eclipsed Mr. Blackadder. He sang comic songs—where he picked them up I know not—that kept the whole company in a roar, and he gave imitations of various individuals, especially of one Mr. Matthews, that surpassed even the singing in drollery. I asked him on our way home where he had seen this Mr. Matthews (as Mr. Blackadder called him); but I cannot recollect that he gave me any information on the subject. I have since heard that there were two play-actors, a father and a son, of that designation; but it could not be either of these two persons, for Archie, I am persuaded, had no intercourse with any member of that vain and frivolous profession.

It was near twelve o'clock when the party broke up. And truly it was time, for several of the bride's friends, who had seemed little at their ease

in the early part of the night, were now uproarious, —it was scarcely seemly in an elder's house.

We went down the stairs in a body, Mr. and Mrs. Blackadder leading the way cautiously, as there was only an oil lamp at the bottom. We were about one-half of the way down when a voice hailed us from above.

“Mr. Trumbull!” it said in a loud whisper.

We stopped and looked up. John McKinlay, with a grin upon his face, which we saw distinctly by the candle he held in his hand, was leaning over the banisters.

“Weel, John, what is it?” said Mr. Turnbull, a decent, bald-headed, elderly man, the doucest of all the company.

“I say, Mr. Trumbull, mind it's your turn noo! Whan am I to come and wait your marriage supper and Kirsty's?”

At which there was a great laugh from those who understood the joke; for Mr. Turnbull, honest man, was a bachelor, and had only a servant-woman to keep his house. He shook his fist, half in anger, half in diversion, at John, who was a privileged person, and often took great

liberties, and muttering, “ Haud your tongue, you scoundrel,—as if ae fule wasna enough ! ” he pushed on that he might get out of earshot of John as quickly as possible.

Mr. and Mrs. Blackadder’s road being the same as ours for some way, we went together. Mrs. Blackadder was very particular in explaining to me, who walked beside her, that it was only to please Mr. Blackadder, who would not “ forego a play upon any account,” that she had consented to be present at the wedding.

“ Your mother did quite right to stay away, Mr. Matthew,” she said ; “ it was neither the proper thing for her nor me to sit down at the same table with Marget Delap or Nancy Chalmers, the upsetting cutie that she is ; but she’s made the last gown for me, I can tell her. Did you hear how she spoke up to the gentlemen ? and her but a mantymaker at a shilling a day.”

But truly, I thought Mrs. Blackadder a vulgar, upsetting woman herself, and liked not that she should associate my mother’s name with hers. And she called Cousin Braidsute a “ sour saint,” and other names besides, which, considering that

she had just partaken of his hospitality, did not seem to me becoming.

We found my mother sitting up for us, and her curiosity about all the events of the evening was so great that Archie, and I suppose Mr. Meggat also, were sound asleep before I had satisfied it. In consequence, I was for once too late to answer to my name at the professor's class in the morning.

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CHAPTER X.

MRS. BRAIDFUTE DROPS OUR ACQUAINTANCE.

AS my mother continued to take no notice of his wife, Cousin Braidfute, some weeks after his marriage, humbled himself so far as to come and expostulate with her. Some of his most important friends, including his minister, had shown him the cold shoulder since the event; while his brother magistrates had made it a subject of jest even at the council board. These annoyances made him doubly anxious that my mother should countenance his wife. She had resolved against any concession, but her kind heart could ill resist entreaty, and he succeeded in extorting a promise from her to call upon his wife.

“I could not do otherwise, Matthew,” she said to me afterwards, “when I saw the man so humbled and crestfallen; and no doubt it will be

better for that unfortunate bairn Sarah that I keep on some terms with her stepmother."

And accordingly she set off next forenoon to wait on the "young folk," as new-married people are called in Scotland,—"just to get it over, since it must be," she said, with the look of one suffering for conscience' sake.

"Bairns," she said, sitting down beside us on her return, and untying the strings of the hideous widow's bonnet of that time, "you would be thinking I was lost. But really my spirit was so tried with that hussy yonder, that I looked in at George's Square on my way back, and sat awhile with Miss Kemp to compose myself. Would you believe it, laddies ! I found madam sitting in state in the best parlour in an arm-chair, which she had not the civility to offer to me, and with gloves on her hands—she that was scouring the pans the other day ! And she could not help me to the wine and cake herself, though they were in a press in the very room, but must needs ring the bell—the silly tawpie!—for the servant-lass to bring them out. Even he had more sense, for he wanted to get them himself; but I saw her give him a

‘gloom,’ and so the poor coof sat down again. I was so provoked with them both that I could scarcely command myself to drink their healths and wish them happiness. Happiness ! there will be little of that going yonder, or I am much mistaken. But, bairns, I’ve asked them to their tea next week, that we may just get done with it at once. We’ll ask the Miss Gilkinsons to meet them—I couldn’t invite Miss Kemp to drink tea with the like of Cousin Braidfute and his wife—and we’ll have Mr. Meggat. And now I’ve done all that can possibly be expected from me, and, indeed, I have done much more than I once thought I could have been brought to.”

They came on the evening appointed ; and very grand did Mrs. Braidfute look in her crimson gown, gold chain, and other wedding “braws.” But if ever man looked humbled and henpecked, it was Cousin Braidfute. The lady was evidently in a bad humour. We did our best to entertain her—and the Miss Gilkinsons were always very good company—and we scrupulously paid her all the honours of her new-married state. But either from caprice, or that something in my mother’s

manner offended her, she sat swelling in her chair, and scarcely opened her lips. And though my mother had provided a comfortable little supper, nothing would induce her to stay to partake of it, even though she could hear the sausages frizzling in the pan, for the kitchen was close to our parlour; but off she flounced, and Cousin Braidfute and Sarah had to follow her.

And that was the first and last visit Mrs. Braidfute paid to us. He came occasionally to see us, but without his wife's knowledge, we suspected. He rarely mentioned her name, and we feared things were not comfortable at home. Compared with his old self, he was a spiritless man now, and we wondered how we had ever stood in awe of him. He became "poor Cousin Braidfute" with us at last, and we were actually glad when he dropped in, and we saw him sitting in his old place. Sarah was not permitted by her stepmother to visit us; but a year after the marriage we accidentally learned that she had been taken from school to help to nurse the baby, which by that time had made its appearance, and that she led a sad life of slavery at home.

I may mention here that my summer holidays were always spent with my friend Adam Bowman. What delicious weeks these were! How sweet were the sights and sounds of rural life to me; the ripening corn rustling in the breeze; the grass glittering with morning dew; and the Culdees loch, inclosed by quiet green hills, lying like a mirror at the foot of the farmhouse brae, reflecting every fleecy cloud that floated on the azure above; the singing of the birds, and even the early crowing of the farmyard cock! They put new life into me, these yearly visits to the Bowmans. The cheerful bustle of the plentiful farmhouse, the simple kindly home-life, of which I formed a part, were most congenial to my nature; besides, I was amongst mine own people.

CHAPTER XI.

ARCHIE GETS INTO THE NAVY.—OUR TROUBLES
WITH LODGERS.—MISS BETTY KILWINNING.

THERE was little change in our quiet household till after I had entered the Divinity Hall. Archie before then had got the appointment of clerk in the infirmary, which gave him great insight into surgery. After satisfactorily filling this situation for two years, and passing his examination as surgeon, the worthy laird of Halcraigs fulfilled his promise by getting Archie made assistant-surgeon on board his brother Captain Kennedy's vessel.

Sore, sore were we grieved to part with Archie, now a handsome young man of three-and-twenty; but it was the calling he preferred, and assuredly God could keep him on the ocean as well as on the dry land. He was in high spirits on his appointment, and therefore we strove to keep up

ours. But I fear we succeeded but ill, for we were never good dissemblers. Archie himself, I think, felt more than he liked to show, for when he wrung my hand at parting (I saw him on board the vessel that was to carry him from Leith to London), he said, with a tear in his eye, "Matt, my boy, this has been a sad week to us all, and I am glad it is over. I leave our mother in your charge ; and I could not leave her," he was pleased to say, "to one who could be kinder and more considerate to her. Take care of yourself, old boy, till we meet again."

"Till we meet again"—words lightly and hopefully spoken, but which, even while he uttered them, made my heart tremble. God alone knew when that time was to be—if ever. I stood on the pier and watched the receding vessel, which bore away for years my only brother, till I could see it no more ; and then, with a heart almost as heavy as it had been six years before, I returned home to comfort my mother. I found her calmly reading her Bible; but there were traces of tears on her face as she looked up when I entered.

For many a day the house was very cheerless

for want of Archie's blithe face and voice,—for though resident latterly at the infirmary, we saw him often. We lived a solitary life, for soon after Archie left us we lost Mr. Meggat's company also, he having obtained a better situation in Liverpool, where he had friends. We were never again so intimate with any lodger; it was just "fair good day" and "fair good e'en" between us; and except Mr. and Miss Kemp, the Miss Gilkinsons, who shared our pew at Lady Glenorchy's church, and in the winter season Mr. Kennedy's family, we had no visitors.

We soon heard of Archie joining his ship at Plymouth; and well pleased he seemed to be both with the captain and the other officers. The captain took unusual notice of him, on account of the laird's recommendation, and because they were parish bairns. We always said that Archie was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Dr. Rattray, his chief, being cut off with a fever two years after Archie was appointed to the ship, he succeeded to his place, and thus became head-surgeon with full pay. We heard from him as often as could be expected, and many a ten-pound

note did he send to his mother. And truly the money was much needed, for the times had become very dear, and people like us had enough to do to make a respectable appearance. But my mother prized the letters far more than the money. She kept them in an old pocket-book, and whenever she had a leisure evening it would be in her hands, and she reading the letters to herself or to Nelly.

But the time of the war came, and then we were long in great anxiety, for Archie's ship was in active service, and having a fighting captain to command her, must aye be among the foremost. O sirs, how we used to study the public prints at that time, hiring in a paper at a penny an hour ! It pleased God, however, to preserve Archie both from death and captivity through that dangerous epoch ; but when it was over it was a sore disappointment to us that he was not permitted to visit home, as his ship was ordered off to a West Indian station.

We had a succession of lodgers after Mr. Meggat left us, but we were unfortunate in all of them ; perhaps he had spoiled us for the ordinary run. They were principally medical students ; and what

with the tobacco smoke with which they poisoned the house, and the irregular hours they kept, my mother was often greatly tried. They also brought human bones into the house; and Nelly, who was somewhat superstitious, was afraid to enter their rooms after dark. Indeed, she once craved leave to lay her bed on the floor of my mother's room, declaring herself unable to sleep alone that night on account of a skull and other remains of mortality which she had unexpectedly come upon that day when cleaning out the press in Mr. John Allshorn's bed-chamber.

My mother and Nelly little guessed that such things were in the house in Archie's time, and with my connivance; but Archie kept them carefully under lock and key. They lay in a deal box under our bed, and many a time had I seen Nelly scrubbing the outside of it with soft-soap and water, happily unconscious of its contents. I cannot honestly affirm, however, that I was totally indifferent to the near neighbourhood of these relics myself—they reminded me overmuch of the kirkyard—but Archie was so hardened by

familiarity with them that I felt shame to betray my feelings regarding them.

Our lodgers also gave us great concern by profaning the Sabbath day. They invariably lay long in bed that morning, and thus deprived either my mother or Nelly of the privilege of attending the forenoon worship. They had always visitors on that evening when at home, and they sat late together, and drank too much toddy. It was not seemly in a house of professing Christians, and at last we saw it to be our duty to tell the young men that we could no longer accommodate them. Then we were without lodgers for a considerable time, as none that applied would conform to our rules; but my mother fought bravely on with the help of Nelly, scrimping here and saving there; and so, though the pantry was often bare enough, we preserved a respectable appearance in the eyes of our neighbours. My mother often expressed the wish that we could get a quiet elderly lady for a lodger, and ere long it was gratified.

Miss Bethia, or Betty Kilwinning, as her friends called her, who came to lodge with us, was an elderly maiden lady of good family and inde-

pendent means, but rather weak in intellect. She had been accustomed to a house of her own, but her relations prevailed upon her to give up housekeeping, for which she was unfit, being at the mercy of every dishonest servant and impostor, and take lodgings instead. Ours were recommended by Mr. Kemp, who was her man of business, and she engaged them permanently on very liberal terms. She brought her own maid with her—a steady, respectable woman, who made herself very agreeable in the house.

Poor Miss Betty was a strange creature. She had always a glimmering of sense, but at times she was very notional and capernoity. When in these moods, her mind ran generally upon house-breakers, and she could not sleep unless her door was so barricaded within as to make it no small labour for her maid, who slept in a light bed-closet off her room, to move the furniture back and forward. Another of her eccentricities was the believing that every bachelor gentleman of her acquaintance was desirous of making her his wife. This infatuation had more than once

exposed her to ridicule and her friends to shame. At the time she came to us she was neither fitted by looks nor age for creating such an attachment. She was forty years old, of a very tall, gaunt personage, and she had a, singularly colourless face—like a ghost's, I used to think—with light lustreless eyes, and a chin out of all proportion in length to the other features. Moreover, she attired herself in garments of a most extraordinary fashion. She had a prodigious quantity of clothes, having preserved almost every gown she had got from her youth up. Miss Betty's garments were therefore of every fashion which had been in vogue for more than twenty years ; and just as the whim moved her she would appear—say this day in a gown of the very scantiest proportions, with the waist up at her armpits, and to-morrow perhaps in a peaked and flowing dress both “syde and wyde,” with lace ruffles at the elbows—point lace her maid called it—very yellow with lying by so many years. Indeed, Miss Betty was always like a picture, though more like one wrought into old tapestry than painted on canvas.

She was occasionally seized with a mania for

examining and airing this gear, and it always took her a whole day, during which no visitor was admitted to her. I once had a glimpse into her room while she and her maid were thus occupied ; and truly it was like a rag fair, every article of furniture being littered with ancient faded habiliments, which exuded a most disagreeable, musty smell. Her bandboxes and trunks were a sight to behold, for no house could supply her with wardrobes and chests of drawers sufficient to contain all her trumpery. But she was a very inoffensive person notwithstanding these peculiarities, and gave very little trouble, some chicken broth or rice and milk being her usual dinner. My mother once ventured to recommend a mutton-chop or a bit of beefsteak as more strengthening and nutritious ; but Miss Betty drew herself up in a dignified way, and expressed her disgust at the proposal so decidedly that she never repeated the liberty.

We were at first somewhat scandalized by her not attending the kirk ; but we agreed that she was not to be judged like others. Her servant, Isabel Rae, likewise assured us that she read

diligently in her Bible on Sabbaths, as well as in Fordyce's "Sermons to Young Women." She also never omitted being present at our family worship, night and morning, and always conducted herself with great decorum. She was very ceremonious on these occasions; her deep curtseys on entering and leaving the room reminded me of some grand court lady of the olden times, especially when she had her head busked up high, and one of her antique garments on. I should not have liked, though, to meet with such a figure in an old-fashioned house late at night. She made a point of always returning me thanks for the edification she professed to derive from our exercise; and truly, she was sometimes more gracious than I cared for after I had got an inkling of her matrimonial weakness, for, like most young lads, I was sensitive to ridicule.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CARRUTHERSES.

ATTER Archie had left us we had moved into a more airy and commodious house. Our new flat was on a very quiet stair—so quiet that for some time we knew not our next door neighbours even by sight. Several weeks elapsed before I saw one of them, though I was daily out. Nor had my mother met them; and Nelly, who had, knew only through the milk-woman that the family consisted of a widowed mother and two daughters, and that the latter were mantua-makers. Their house, though on the same floor, was much inferior to ours, being contracted by a building behind; and they kept no servant—the younger sister, who was somewhat deformed, doing the work of the house when her health permitted, while the elder sat constantly sewing. Nelly thought that the mother must be bedridden, for

she never saw her nor heard her voice when both doors chanced to be open at the same time.

My curiosity became excited about this singularly quiet family, and I confess that latterly I was oftener upon our common stair than I needed to be. It was some time, however, before it was gratified, and then it was only the deformed girl that I met. She passed me shyly and hurriedly the first few times. She was respectably but very plainly dressed. It was some time before I summoned courage to give her "Good-day." When I did so she returned my salutation quietly but courteously; it required many such greetings to make us acquainted with each other.

Still I had never seen the other sister, though Nelly said she had occasionally noticed her go out in the evenings, as if to carry work home to her employers. "She was a delicate-looking thing," Nelly said, "and seemed as if she needed baith fresh air and sweet milk to make her strong; and she doesna look ower happy like," added Nelly, who had much shrewdness, "though maybe it's the late hours (for I think they sometimes sit

very late at their work) that gies her that patient, suffering kind o' look."

I was touched by the picture Nelly had drawn. The image of the pale, quiet girl toiling, perhaps beyond her strength, for a maintenance—Nelly thought they were poor—took strong hold of my imagination, and though I was generally backward in making new acquaintances, I felt a considerable desire to know these Carrutheresses—for that was their name. Miss Kemp, who knew something about almost everybody, was able to give us some information concerning them. The father had been clerk many years in the chambers of a relation of her mother's, who, in consideration of his long services, had settled a small annuity upon his widow, sufficient to pay rent and taxes, but the daughters had to work for their livelihood and hers.

"I remember my cousin Montgomery spoke highly of the family," said Miss Kemp—who, however, had a good word to say of everybody—"and especially of the elder daughter, who, she said, was the principal support of the family, for the younger had a weak spine, which unfitted her

for much labour, and the mother had had some kind of shock after her husband's death—which was sudden—that had left her very helpless, and deprived her of the use of speech. Dear me!" added Miss Kemp, her eyes filling with tears, "I should really like to be of some service to them, if I only knew how."

My mother thought that, being so near a neighbour, she might venture to call upon them. "And I shall give Miss Carruthers my new gown to make."

"To be sure," said good Miss Kemp, cheerily; "we can both be customers, and I shall do my best to get them more."

But I myself was fated to be the first visitor. On the second evening after this conversation I returned from my walk unusually early, to find the house door locked. The fact was that Miss Betty and her maid (who accompanied her mistress wherever she went) had gone to spend the evening with a friend, and as my mother herself was going out, she had given Nelly liberty till eight o'clock, not expecting me to return before that hour. I rang the door-bell several times, and was very

uneasy at hearing no movement within the house —fearing that Nelly might have met with some accident and be lying within unable to help herself. Nelly's holidays were so rare that her absence did not occur to me. I was in the act of stooping down, trying to see into the house through the keyhole, when the opposite door opened, and the girl with whom I was now on speaking terms looked out.

"I heard your bell ring more than once," she said; "and as I saw your servant go out some time ago, I came to offer to take any message."

Thanking her, I turned to go downstairs, meaning to proceed to the meadows and rest on one of the benches there till Nelly was likely to have returned. But I suppose that Alison—for that was her name—saw that I was fatigued: for after a moment's hesitation she stepped after me, and considerably invited me to wait in her mother's house till ours was opened. Now, though here was an excellent opportunity of getting acquainted with the family, I was naturally so bashful that my first impulse was to refuse it; but Alison kindly pressing her invitation, I yielded, and followed her

into the house. It was not so well lighted as ours, besides being smaller. The narrow lobby, however, was very clean, and so was the girl's house-dress, though faded and shabby. In it her deformity was more striking than in her street one; and, like the generality of those who suffer from this affliction, her countenance wore an expression of pain and irritability. Closing the house door after admitting me, she silently led the way into their sitting-room.

It was an ordinary-sized parlour, plainly and scantily furnished. At the heavy old-fashioned table of almost black mahogany, which occupied the centre of the room, stood, with her back to me when I entered, a young slightly-formed woman, who was shaping some garment which was spread out on the faded baize cover. An old woman, who seemed half asleep, was seated in a large chair, made to run easily on castors, by the fireside. She was dressed in well-worn widow's weeds, but looked very decent and respectable. My unexpected appearance roused her a little; and the young woman, turning round at the sound of my step, seemed much surprised. Alison briefly men-

tioned who I was, and the situation in which she had found me; and then, having placed a chair for me at the opposite side of the fireplace to her mother's, she retired to the window and took up a seam that lay there.

They were so shy and quiet themselves that I had to exert myself to talk. I naturally addressed myself at first to the elderly woman; besides, I have always found it easier to speak to old folks and children than to young grown-up people, especially of the female sex. But I was soon checked by the elder young woman.

"My mother cannot answer you, sir, I am sorry to say," she said, in a low clear voice, which was very pleasant to listen to; "she hears what is said to her, but for some years she has lost the power of speech."

My embarrassment had made me forget what Miss Kemp had told us. I regarded the poor old lady with great compassion. Her bodily affliction had doubtless somewhat obscured the brain, and rendered her vacant and listless like. But she showed that she understood the observations I had made by nodding her head and feebly smiling

in answer. My remarks had broken the ice, and I was able to carry on a conversation with the two young women—or rather, with the one who had just spoken, for Alison took little share in it.

I found Jeanie Carruthers a modest, sensible young woman. She was not forward to talk, nor was she probably much accustomed to converse with strangers ; but there was a native politeness about her that doubtless made her feel she would be wanting in hospitality if she did not endeavour to entertain their unexpected guest. I was evidently no stranger to her by name, and she knew that I was studying for the ministry. I soon felt at my ease with her, and we gradually got into very interesting talk. In the course of it I learned that these young women—the elder could not have been more than two-and-twenty—had not been out of town for years. Jeanie Carruthers, of course, did not say that it was owing to straitened means,—merely that their work kept them closely occupied,—but the reason was obvious.

“Poor thing!” thought I, as I looked at her, “I wish you were rambling over our green braes instead of hanging over that weary seam, which,

I suppose, is never out of your hands from one year's end to another; it would bring a glint of red into that colourless face." They were sewing mournings, and their pale complexions contrasted strikingly with the black material.

Jeanie Carruthers was not what the world calls a beauty, but her face grew wonderfully upon my liking during the time that I conversed with her. Her figure was rather tall, and had a slight stoop,—partly, perhaps, caused by weakness, and partly by her occupation. I particularly remarked her hands, which were very white and thin—almost transparent, they seemed to me. Her hair and eyes were dark, and her brow broad and smooth. She resembled her sister, but she had not the sickly look nor the fretful expression which spoiled Alison's face. There was, as Nelly had said, a look both of patience and sadness in it; as if her life had been a joyless and struggling but not a repining one. She seldom raised her eyes from her work, so that I was able to examine both her and the room—her figure concealing me from Alison's observation, and the poor old mother having dropped into a slumber.

I thought I could discern indubitable signs of poverty in the apartment—which was almost chillingly clean, notwithstanding the work that must constantly be going on in it. Everything to my eye had a pinched and meagre aspect. The carpet was so worn, and so much darned, that the pattern was scarcely recognisable; and the heavy mahogany chairs, of the same date as the table, and probably bought second-hand when the parents began house-keeping, had many a patch of black moreen in-grafted on their original haircloth. The grate was contracted by a couple of bricks, so as to contain only a very small fire, and it was a cold backward spring, that one; however, the old mother had a warm shawl around her shoulders, and her nether limbs were carefully happed with another. Both girls looked as if they were insufficiently fed; but I have generally observed this appearance in solitary females, especially those who gain their livelihood by the needle; and it arises, probably, from that feeble appetite and irritable state of nerves which make them prefer tea for its soothing qualities to more substantial food.

I sat upwards of an hour with them, though I

heard Nelly unlock our door long before I took my leave. They must also have heard her, but they were too well-bred to take notice of it. On going, I ventured to say that as we were such near neighbours I hoped the acquaintance just begun would not be allowed to drop ; on which both the young women smiled, and assured me that they would always be glad to see me. The poor old lady had wakened up, so I pressed her nerveless hand and came away, escorted to the door by Alison.

I soon got into an almost daily habit of visiting the Carrutherises, for I never found myself in the way, or caused any interruption to the work. Besides their customers they had no acquaintances, as they had no time for visiting ; and the monotony of their lives was probably the reason why they took so kindly to me at the very first ; and their society did me much good.

I speedily found that there were many trivial attentions I could pay them, and for which they were most grateful. They were passionately fond of flowers—a taste, however, which they could seldom indulge, for they could not afford to pur-

chase them. A scraggy myrtle and a rose-tree stood in the window on a small round table, and they were tended as their choicest treasures. On Saturdays I often took walks into the country to procure flowers for them, after witnessing the pleasure that a simple posy could confer on these closely-confined young women. It was touching to see how they prized and cherished these flowers, sometimes gathered merely from the hedges and hillsides, and it was a sufficient reward to me for the longest and most fatiguing walk. I was as disappointed as they when rainy weather set in and prevented me from obtaining a supply. They thought that I took these rambles for my own pleasure, and they were very grateful to me for thinking of their tastes while enjoying my exercise. They never imagined that the sole motive which at that busy time took me so many Saturday afternoons from home was to obtain this little treat for them.

I also used to read aloud to them when I had more leisure than usual and my mother was too busy to miss me. This was a great pleasure, and helped on the work wonderfully. Alison was fond

of poetry—Jeanie had a more practical turn. She liked history and books of travels, especially in America. Indeed, she seemed so interested in everything connected with that country that at first I thought they might have relations there, till assured of the contrary. I was a zealous frequenter of bookstalls at that period—having a little spending money, owing to some teaching I had obtained through Mr. Kemp—and many a volume did I procure from the college library expressly for Jeanie and Alison Carruthers.

They liked me to talk to them about my native place, its kindly people, quiet hills, and green pastures ; and ere long they were familiar with all the parish traditions. About our old home-life there, my father and my sister Mary, they would often question me with simple interest ; and gradually they grew so associated with that life that it seemed to me as if they as well as we had, years ago, sat together round the manse fireside.

Sometimes, but very rarely, one of them would take a walk with me. It could only be when business was slack, for they could not afford to leave their work. It was a great enjoyment to them—

the more precious that it came so seldom. Our walks were little varied: they were either in the direction of the sea, or by the foot of Arthur's Seat towards Duddingstone. The latter was the favourite; its wild features, and fresh, breezy air had a wonderful charm for the poor girls, who were compelled for six days in the week to pursue a monotonous calling in a close room, commanding no view but the opposite side of the street. Till they became acquainted with me they had not for years, they assured me, enjoyed even this simple pleasure, for they could not get out together, and they were too timid and spiritless to walk alone.

What pleasant walks these were through the romantic scenery of what is now the Queen's Park! When requiring to rest, we used to climb a short way up the hillside out of the usual track, and, seated on the grass, would gaze at our ease on the widespread prospect, ever discerning new beauties to point out to each other. Then, when refreshed, we would wander on, gathering sprigs of heather, and deep blue vervain, and graceful tufted grasses, to form a nosegay for the parlour, which, carefully watched, would serve to beautify it for

the following week. I look back to these walks with a strange tenderness that years ago would not have been unmixed with pain.

I had not known the Carrutherises many months before I discovered that Jeanie had many things to try her patience and spirits. For so young and delicate a woman, she had a heavy and unusual burden to bear. Not only was the poor mother almost entirely helpless—she had fortunately the use of her hands, and could amuse herself with knitting—but Alison was subject to severe illnesses, which for days and sometimes weeks incapacitated her from assisting her sister; and she was apt at all seasons—and no wonder, considering her bodily ailments—to be captious and irritable in her temper. She was jealous of being counted a burden by her sister; and when in this morbid mood she would say sharp, unkind things (for my presence soon ceased to be a restraint to her) that I marvelled Jeanie could bear so calmly. At other times she would be seized with sullen fits, and would remain silent for hours together; though it was to her own discomfort, for Jeanie being the more skilful workwoman, had often to direct her

in her work. And sometimes she would fall into violent hysterical weepings, which were painful to witness, and which required much soothing and firmness to check. Poor Alison ! hers was truly a weak physical frame, and sickness and penury had soured a kind and generous nature.

The patience with which Jeanie bore all this made a deep impression on my mind. The only feeling that these ebullitions of temper seemed to excite in her was pity. She had often to nurse her mother and sister in addition to her usual work ; often, too, when I thought that she required nursing herself. It was distressing to me to see her pale cheeks and dim eyes at these seasons, and to know that when our house was shut up for the night, Jeanie Carruthers would still be working by the light of a single candle, finishing some task which necessity rendered imperative. But she was one who never complained of fatigue or talked of herself. My respect for Jeanie Carruthers grew with my knowledge of her.

This was a very happy period of my life. The hours spent in the Carrutherses' parlour were among the pleasantest that have fallen to my lot. I felt

myself of use to these poor girls, and their society filled the void which Archie and Mr. Meggat had left behind them. My quiet ways suited them. They were interested in all my anxieties, which at that time were many, for I had now applied to be taken upon trial as a probationer, and was preparing for my appearance before the presbytery.

We would often amuse ourselves by picturing the parish of which I was to be the pastor. We agreed that it was to be far away from towns,—a peaceful, solitary place, where the Sabbath-bell would summon a kindly, primitive people into the small hillside or moorland sanctuary. In imagination we went the round of my ministerial duties: visited the sick and poor, and yearly catechised the whole of my flock. And we had even some idea that a neat cottage among the hills might be discovered, where Jeanie and Alison could make gowns and bonnets for the farmers' wives and daughters, instead of the burghers' families of Edinburgh. Ah me! it was simple castle building.



CHAPTER XIII.

I AM LICENSED.

IT was an agitating time to me when I was on my trials before the presbytery. My heart was in my mouth, as the saying is, during the whole period of my examination. I got a bad turn at the very beginning, by one of the members starting a doubt as to my being of fitting age for taking on me the office of the ministry; and though I soon set that point at rest, it disturbed my mind, for, to tell the truth, the juvenility of my appearance was a subject on which I was rather tender. I had, according to rule, to read a portion of two discourses before the presbytery, that they might judge of my gifts and doctrine. This was not so trying, however, as praying extempore before such a learned and grave assemblage, many of them not only venerable fathers of the kirk, but the most eloquent preachers therein,—

for the towns always lick up the best of every-
thing. My discourses were pronounced solid and
evangelical, and "happily free," as one member
—I think it was Sir Henry Moncrieff, father of the
present Lord of Session of that name—remarked,
"from that profusion of metaphor which young
preachers often mistake for eloquence." So they
licensed me to preach the word, like my father
before me; and with a relieved and, I trust,
solemnised spirit, I left the presbytery court to
carry the tidings to my mother and the Car-
rutherses.

But a still greater trial lay before me—namely,
preaching without the paper in public. It was for-
midable enough to face the presbytery, where each
member was rendered more or less tolerant by the
remembrance of his own first experiences; yet what
was that to standing up in a pulpit, and preaching
from memory before a whole congregation, every
eye of which would be concentrated upon me?
My heart begins to throb as of old when I recall
it. It is true I had had some little practice already,
for during the last year of my divinity course I had
been in the habit of rehearsing the discourses I

had begun to write to my mother and the Carrutheresses, hoping thus to acquire confidence; and truly, though the smallest, they were the most attentive congregation I ever had. But what a difference between partial friends and strangers!

It was arranged that I was to preach my maiden sermon in a kirk a few miles from town. It was a small country congregation there, and therefore I trusted to get through the duties of the pulpit with tolerable composure. I committed my discourse most carefully to memory during the previous week, being at it early and late, and repeating it both to my mother and the Carrutheresses, who all did their best to encourage me, although they only partially succeeded—I having hot and cold fits by turns, though the cold predominated. The coming Sabbath was seldom out of my head. If for a minute my thoughts were diverted from it, it came back like a stab through my heart the next; and, indeed, I wonder that my fears did not altogether incapacitate me for fulfilling my engagement.

Mr. Balbirnie, the minister for whom I was to officiate, had invited me to come to Kirkland manse on the Saturday evening; so on the after-

noon of that day, having put the important sermon and a clean shirt and neckcloth into my pocket, I bade my mother a troubled farewell till Monday. She would not appear otherwise than cheerful, and she followed me to the stair-head, patting my back encouragingly and bidding me take heart. Nelly, too, came after me ; and again and again she bade me look on the “folk in the kirk as sae mony kailstocks. I hae heard,” she said, “that auld Mr. Router of Keltie—and he was a minister that was weel respected in the country—used aye to gie that advice to young preachers.”

It was not so easy to practise, however ; and truly it must be an extraordinary imagination that can transform a congregation of thinking men and women into the semblance of green kail. It may be successful with some, but it altogether failed with me, as I experienced to my sorrow.

Kirkland was a good stretch from town ; it was a pleasant-lying place, and I had often walked there and back on Saturdays with Mr. Meggat. I was too anxious about the morrow to enjoy my present walk. It was a March afternoon—pretty sharp and breezy, compelling one to step out

briskly. I calculated on arriving about the manse tea-time, just before dusk.

The minister was a widower, with three grown-up daughters, of whom I had heard some alarming things within the last few days. I was told that they were each more or less of the order of blue stockings, and that on account of their satirical propensities they were much dreaded by young preachers, who could hardly be got to preach for their father even for payment. But for my unfortunate shyness in company, I might have learned this earlier and avoided the danger. It was now too late. Truly it was a pleasant prospect for me to have to preach my first sermon before such pretentious misses, and I deeply regretted having been so facile as to engage myself to Mr. Balbirnie. But we had met at Mr. Kemp's on the day after I was licensed, and he had so insisted, in his kind but overbearing way, that I should preach my first sermon to his people, that there was nothing for it but to acquiesce.

It was near six o'clock, and growing dusk, when I reached the village which contained the manse and kirk. It was a bit small town of one row of

cottages, with a brawling burn at the back of them which turned a mill. It was most appropriately called Mossy Mill, for the thatched roof was very green ; so were some huge twisted roots and trunks of trees that sprung from the steep ivied bank that overhung the mill, and all around was—

“ Green, and mossy, and watery,”

as some poet says. Painters, I am told, have often made pictures of that mill, and of the little foot-bridge beside it. It must be a cool, shady place on a warm summer day, but I should not be surprised to hear that the miller suffers from rheumatism.

The manse was situated at the far end of the village, separated from it only by a neat swing gate and a gravelled walk. It had recently been enlarged, and was now unusually roomy and commodious for a manse ; but the minister was wealthy, and could afford to keep it up. The kirk and burial-ground were on the opposite side of the road, the two gates nearly fronting each other. The kirk was very old, and had evidently been built in Popish times, for there was an unusual profusion of ornament about the stonework for a Presbyterian kirk. There was also a finely-executed coat-of-

arms above the entrance to a grawsome family vault outside the building ; and such numbers of skulls and crossbones, hour-glasses and puffy cherubim on the gravestones, I have never seen in any other kirkyard except Tranent.

As I approached the manse I felt very nervous at the prospect of meeting the minister's daughters. He himself was of a very genial temperament, and was considered remarkably hospitable. The servant who opened the door to me told me that the family were just sitting down to tea ; and to my great relief the minister came into the lobby, and giving me a hearty welcome, led me into the dining-room, where his three daughters were seated at the tea-table.

“ You have never seen my lassies before, I think, Mr. Morrison,” said he, jocosely : “ this is Jean, the eldest, my housekeeper,” denoting the one who was making the tea, and who was a sonsy-like lass, very like her father ; “ this is Pris, my second, who, as you are new off the irons, will tackle you with Latin and Greek if you like ; and this is Peg, my youngest, who writes poetry.”

The two youngest misses drew up their heads

and looked saucy enough at this unceremonious introduction to the preacher, who in many manses is regarded as a very insignificant individual to whom little attention is due. There are bright exceptions to this rule, however, as many a bashful inexperienced lad has found. No one of them offered to shake hands with me; to be sure, the eldest had the teapot in hers at the time. Miss Pris, as her father called her, examined me, I was conscious, somewhat superciliously.

"You are so odd, papa," she said, sharply; "why do you call us by such horrid names?"

"Horrid names, Miss Pris! Well, then, Miss Balbirnie, Miss Priscilla, (Scripture name, Mr. Morrison), and Miss Margaret Balbirnie,—known only to her friends, however, by the name of Peg. Anything for a quiet life, Mr. Morrison."

I tried to smile, as was expected, but felt constrained and uncomfortable, being very deficient in that species of humour which distinguished the minister, and, indeed, unable to appreciate it in others. He was very jocular during tea-time, though I thought his geniality had somewhat too much of patronage in it. He was evidently proud

of his daughters, and desirous of showing off their gifts before the stranger—more, perhaps, than was altogether becoming or hospitable. I was afraid to open my lips in their presence, they made such a parade of their knowledge. I could not help mentally contrasting them with Jeanie Carruthers, and thinking that her modest retiring ways and simple acquirements made her a more useful and womanly creature than these learned misses. Knowledge, no doubt, is a valuable thing; but surely a woman loses more than she gains if she sacrifices the gentleness and diffidence natural to her sex for the possession of it. Most of the learned women I have met with singularly wanted ballast; were bad managers; slatternly in their persons; and generally kept ill-redd-up houses; and if that is not a striking commentary on the subject, I know not what it is. But truly, I suspected that the learning of the Miss Balbirnies was only skin-deep, “much cry and little woo,” as is the case, doubtless, with the generality of female philosophers.

Miss Balbirnie was a hearty, good-tempered-looking body, on the shady side of thirty, who, if

she had not had clever sisters, would probably never have set up for cleverness herself. She talked in a fine style of language, but every now and then some common word would slip out that showed she was not perfect in her lesson. I thought it likely that the others kept her in order—left to herself she might have been agreeable enough. Miss Priscilla evidently ruled the roast by virtue of her Greek and Latin; but she knew not how to darn stockings—at least I opined so from something I saw that night—and she would have been nothing the worse of a cleaner ruffle round her neck. Miss Margaret, the poetess, was, of course, a sentimental young woman. She had a strange trick of shutting her eyes—winking with both at once would perhaps be the better description—when she spoke, and of heaving deep sighs as if she were scant of breath; she, indeed, might be asthmatic. She condescended to ask me such questions as “Did I walk alone from town?” and “Were not solitary evening walks delightful?”—which I cautiously answered in monosyllables, and doubtless this did not raise me in her estimation. I learned from their remarks that their father had

told them that I was to preach for the first time next day, which grieved me to the heart, and I wished that I had asked him not to mention it.

After tea I requested permission to retire to the minister's study, which I did not leave till the bell rang for family worship. Mr. Balbirnie asked me to pray, but I excused myself, I am afraid too earnestly, for I observed his two younger daughters smile to each other, which gave me a further inkling of the ordeal before me on the morrow. It was when she knelt down in front of me at the prayer that I noticed the hole in the heel of Miss Priscilla's stocking; and truly, it gave me my revenge, for how I could have retaliated upon her! And as she was declaiming like a professor at the supper-table, it was aye "the stocking, the stocking," that rose to my lips as a burden to her exposition.

I was glad when bedtime, which was rather late in that house, arrived. I was lodged in a most comfortable chamber; nevertheless I passed a restless night, and by six o'clock was up and at my sermon. I had descried the entrance to the garden from my window, so I stole downstairs

before even the servants were stirring, unlocked the house door, and made my way to a shady retired walk, screened from observation from the house by a very thick and lofty holly hedge, which also rendered it very snug and sheltered. Here I paced up and down for nearly two hours, trying to fancy that the gooseberry and currant bushes on either hand were men and women, and addressing my discourse to them. I found I could deliver it to my vegetable audience without hesitation. But truly there is such a thing as over-learning a sermon; and in that case, preaching becomes a mere sing-song, a mechanical act of the memory, without the higher powers of the mind being called into exercise. I would advise inexperienced preachers, especially if of nervous temperament, not to trust to a good memory, as agitation may temporarily disorder it, but to have their manuscript in the Bible, and to turn over its pages although they do not read them; and thus they will be enabled to go on with comfort and composure of mind till habit gives them confidence. To be sure, the use of the paper is much more tolerated now than it was in my young days, when

to be known as a “reader” was enough to destroy a preacher’s prospects and usefulness. As for myself, if I had spent the greater part of the time I have described in asking the Lord for the help and strength I needed for the duty before me, and that the sermon I was to preach might be made a blessing to the people, it would have been better for me.

I made but a poor breakfast, though I had been up so early—a little tea and toast was all I could swallow; nor were my nerves improved by the minister’s significant remarks on my want of appetite. How I envied him the composure with which he broke the shell of his egg, and afterwards devoured slice after slice of a fine bacon ham, of which he vainly tempted me to partake! I wondered if he had made such a good breakfast the morning of the day on which he preached his first sermon, and if he recollects anything about it now. I would have asked him if his daughters had not been present, for it would have been an encouragement to know that he also had had similar tremors. He at last tried in grave earnest to cheer me up, for my trepidation increased as the hour

for public worship drew near, and I have no doubt could be discerned in my face; but his manner was too rough and burly to suit a nervous person, and his attempts at encouragement did me no good. I think Miss Balbirnie had some feeling for me, for she wanted to bring me brandy, which I refused, being afraid of confusing my head.

There was only one diet of public worship in Kirkland at this time of year. Mr. Balbirnie's custom was to expound a chapter after the psalm and prayer, then after another interval of praise and prayer to preach for an hour or thereby. I stipulated with him that he should conduct the early portion of the service—that is, pray and expound, and then retire from the pulpit, leaving me to do the rest. I should thus, I hoped, be familiarised with my position before my part in the day's duties fell to me, which I expected would be a great help.

CHAPTER XIV.

MY FIRST SERMON.

NEVER shall I forget the sinking of heart with which I heard the first tinkle of the kirk bell. I was able to assume an appearance of composure as I accompanied the minister to the kirk, but every limb was trembling. As usual in country places, the kirkyard wall, being low, was crowded with male sitters, who, while taking off their hats respectfully to the minister, examined me curiously as we passed in front of them. Country folks are very apt to judge of a man's gifts by the size of his bones and sinews, and look with far more respect on a preacher of a powerful frame of body, and lungs corresponding, than on one of a diminutive and feeble build, like myself. The minister was a tall, portly man, and I was conscious of appearing to great disadvantage beside him. And as if purposely to

add to my distress, he thoughtlessly informed me that the congregation was more numerous than usual, owing to the people having heard that a new hand was to preach.

I followed the minister into the vestry, and was there arrayed for the first time in the official gown. Mr. Balbirnie helped me on with it, and made me drink a glass of wine, a bottle of which he kept in a press. The wine gave me some heart, and as the bell had now ceased, and the betheral had taken the books to the pulpit, I prepared to follow him there—the minister coming hindmost. The passage from the vestry door to the pulpit was, fortunately, not a long one, and while proceeding along it I kept my eyes steadily fixed on the man's back, that the sight of the congregation might not unnerve me at the beginning. But there was an unchancy half-witted old wife, who always sat on the pulpit stairs, and about whom the betheral ought to have given me notice. She had already taken her place—from which there was no dislodging her without using unbecoming violence—and though there was room enough for us to pass her, over her I must needs stumble, owing to the gown, which

was too long for me, getting twisted about my legs. The minister, providentially, got a grip of me before I had either hurt her or much affronted myself ; but she was of a cankered nature, and though it was in the kirk and I was to preach, she did not scruple audibly to say, " Sorra's in the lad ! " " Whisht, Jenny, my woman ! " I heard the minister whisper in answer, clapping her on the shoulder to quiet her. It made my face burn like the fire ; but as Mr. Balbirnie on entering the pulpit stood up immediately at the book-board to give out the psalm, his broad figure tolerably screened me from observation and gave me time to recover myself.

I ventured at length to raise my eyes and glance round the kirk. It was little different from the usual country kirks of that period, except in being somewhat more antique in its aspect ; the crumbling, worm-eaten woodwork was of oak, almost black with age, and the pulpit and mouldings of the doors were quaintly carved. There was a small gallery in front of the pulpit, and one on either hand, with an aisle under each, for the building was in form of a cross. These aisles were lighted

with narrow small-paned windows of coarse glass in which the men had piled their hats, and it was a grey day. I was glad to see that the kirk was so gloomy. In the table seat were several old pauper wives in duffle cloaks and white mutches, with a black ribbon pinned across them ; and a few old men. One of the heritors' (proprietors') lofts was empty, but to my sorrow the front and most conspicuous one was filled to the door with gentry, among whom were seated several spoiled and restless bairns. The minister's seat—a square seat with a table in the middle—was on one side of the pulpit ; and seated there, with their faces to the preacher, were the three misses, each prepared with paper and pencil to take notes of the sermon.

The minister in his prayer must needs allude, forsooth, to his “ dear young friend, who was to be privileged that day for the first time to preach the gospel.” I did not thank him for it, but I believe he meant kindly by me. What kind of exposition he gave I know not, but when he closed the Bible it seemed to me the briefest that had ever been delivered in a kirk. My time, I found, was now

come, and with a species of quiet desperation I prepared to face the congregation.

It was truly a trying moment of my life when Mr. Balbirnie, after giving me an encouraging clap on my knee, retired from the pulpit to his family seat, and I rose, and with a voice which I vainly endeavoured to steady, gave out a psalm to be sung. At my request a stool had been placed in the pulpit, which I had been told was a deep one, to raise me to a convenient height above the book-board ; but as Mr. Balbirnie needed no extra elevation, it had been pushed under the seat by the betheral, who told me I should find it there and could draw it forward when necessary. There was no time, however, for doing so between the minister's leaving and the giving out of the second psalm, so that my head and shoulders only were visible to the congregation at the first, which must have looked awkward and singular. While they were singing, I succeeded in pulling the stool forward ; but it was a broad, ponderous thing, and made a weary creaking and straining during the process, which must have been audible to the people near the pulpit, notwithstanding the bawl-

ing of the precentor, who was one of the most uncultivated singers that have so often disgraced our Scotch kirks. I got it properly placed at last, and when the singing was over I stood up on it to pray.

I never once opened my eyes till I had concluded. I got through the duty with tolerable composure, and I trust with some devotional feeling also. I was addressing my God, and this solemnised and elevated my spirit, delivering me for a season from my slavish fear of man. But when the noise of the people resuming their seats, and of the usual coughing and blowing of noses, was succeeded by the deep expectant silence preparatory to turning over the leaves of the Bibles in search of the text, I felt as if all my former apprehensions were returning with double force upon me. Groping in my pocket, to be sure that my manuscript was at hand in case of accident, I pronounced the text, and fixing my eyes determinedly on a monumental slab on the wall opposite the pulpit, I commenced to preach, my one object being to get through the service as speedily as possible.

I was dubious if my voice sufficiently filled the kirk, therefore I strained it to the uttermost, and probably this rendered it shrill and discordant; for my lungs are in proportion to the size of my body, and, though free from weakness, are certainly deficient in power and compass. This unusual exertion ere long threw me into a violent heat, and I was constantly compelled to pause and wipe my face. Though I had resolved not to look at the congregation, I was irresistibly tempted at these times to steal a glance at them. They were all singularly attentive; there was not a head to be seen on a bookboard or a wandering eye apparent through the whole kirk. On the contrary, every one seemed open-eyed and open-mouthed, gazing at me with an expression of wonder and curiosity. It may have been the unhappy juvenility of my aspect, or it may have been the high key in which my voice was pitched, that thus attracted their attention,—for country congregations are proverbially sleepy-headed, and often as I have preached that sermon since, it has never awakened the same interest. This close observation, instead of encouraging, distressed me

I felt as if they were all watching for my breaking down. There were two places in the kirk that I never consciously glanced at—the minister's seat and the front gallery one—yet somehow I was cognisant of significant looks being exchanged between the misses below and the gentry above.

All things considered, however, I had got on with some freedom for at least a quarter of an hour. My memory had not yet threatened to fail me, and I was beginning to feel that I had got over the worst, when, being once more obliged to pause, not merely to wipe my forehead, but to gain breath, my eye chanced to light on a face in the centre of the front aisle. The face was that of an elderly man, shrewd, critical, and severe. The eye, even in the obscurity of the aisle, shone with a keen, cold glitter, like steel in the moonlight, from under a shaggy, grizzled eyebrow, and it was fixed upon me. My mind was in that morbid state which rendered it peculiarly sensitive to disturbing influences. From the first moment I saw it, this face exercised a kind of fascination over me. It was like what I have read in travellers' books about the power which a serpent's eye has

over a bird. I had no difficulty in recognising the *status* of the individual. He was doubtless of note in the congregation—a ruling elder, perhaps—and he was now bent on judging this new accession to the ministry, which, in my insignificant person, was holding forth to them this day. Now my eye never removed from the slab without instantly singling him out among all the hearers in the aisle. If on any of these occasions I had found his gaze averted from me, the spell would have been broken, but the stern look of attention never relaxed. It became at last a species of persecution, and irritated and distracted me far more than the scribbling of the minister's daughters or the fidgeting of the bairns in the front gallery. A cold perspiration began to burst out all over me, my presence of mind, I agonisingly felt, was deserting me, and though I still continued my discourse, I was conscious that I owed it to a mere mechanical trick of memory, and that whenever a word failed me I must come to an abrupt stop.

That moment, I grieve to say, did arrive, and I fairly broke down in the middle of a sentence. Whereabouts I was in the sermon seemed utterly

obliterated from my recollection, therefore every effort to take up the stitch I had dropped only confused me the more. I would not wish my greatest enemy (though I am thankful to say that I am at peace with all men) to experience such misery as I endured that unhappy moment. There was I standing up in the pulpit, the mark to which every eye in the wondering congregation was directed, a "stickit" preacher—name most dreaded by all youthful aspirants after the office of the ministry—my eyes fixed in utter confusion upon the Bible before me; my tongue literally cleaving to the roof of my mouth; and the perspiration trickling down my forehead and cheeks so as to take all the starch out of my shirt collar and neckcloth. I had a vivid consciousness of certain titterings, ill-disguised by coughs and clearings of the throat, taking place in the kirk, even in the very manse seat. There was also a peculiar rustle, as if the folks in the backmost pews were rising up to get a better view of me; and with the tail of my eye I saw that the half-witted old wife was standing erect on the pulpit stairs, taking note of my proceedings.

How long the pause lasted I know not—it might be moments or it might be minutes—to my feelings it was hours. But the very desperation of my situation supplied me with courage ; and just in the nick of time—for the minister, as he afterwards informed me, was in the act of rising up to take my place—I plunged my hand into my pocket, and pulling out the written sermon, which I ought to have had before me from the first, I opened it at random, and commenced at the first paragraph that caught my eye, though quite uncertain whether I might not have already preached it. I neither lifted eye nor finger from the paper till I had finished the discourse. I must have read most indistinctly, for my mouth was as dry as a piece of burnt brick, and there was a sensation about my throat as if a ball was sticking half-way down it. How I prayed I know not ; but after pronouncing the benediction at the close, I found myself at last cowering back in the pulpit, exhausted both in body and mind, while the congregation were dismissing.

When the betheral came to open the pulpit door for me there was a suppressed grin upon his face I was ashamed to meet the people, and lingered in

the pulpit till the kirk was almost empty. The silly old wife, however, was very slow and hirpling in her movements, and I overtook her and another old woman in the passage. She turned and saw me, and the unfeeling creature, who had neither the bowels of a wife nor a mother, girned at me with her sour wrinkled face, and bade me "gang hame, and learn my lesson better." The other woman had better manners, however, and sharply told her to "haud her ill-scrapit tongue, and let the puir young lad alone."

I found the minister waiting for me in the vestry. He made very light of my misfortune, and seemed to regard it rather as a good joke.

"Hoots, man!" said he, in his hearty, jovial way, giving me a sounding slap on the shoulder, that, in my present weak state, made me stagger,—"cheer up! Many a man has broken down in his first sermon and become a popular preacher afterwards. Think no more on't; you'll do better the next time!"

I shook my head in utter despondency; I was grievously cast down.

"Ay, ay, ay! you think it's all up with you just

now. But I nearly stuck myself, man, the first time I preached. Go your ways up to the manse, and rest yourself for half an hour. The session and I have to meet here; but I'll join you at the end of that time—you'll be a different man after dinner."

I accordingly left him in the vestry waiting for the elders. They were standing in the passage outside, and the foremost of them was the grim old carle who had worked me so much ill. I slunk past them with downcast head. The kirkyard was clear by this time, and I hurried through it and up to the manse. I stole like a guilty thing in at the door, which happened to be open, and ascended the stairs to my room. I had taken my resolution. I could not face the minister's daughters after what had occurred; and I had a yearning desire to return to my mother, who would sympathise with and console me. Hurriedly cramming my things into my pocket, I hastened away, for fear I might meet the minister, who I knew would frustrate my purpose. Fortunately, I met a servant girl in the lobby downstairs, and I asked her to tell Mr. Balbirnie that as I did not feel well (which

was truth), I was returning to Edinburgh. I was glad when I got beyond the bounds of the manse and kirk, and then, stealing through the village like a criminal who fears detection, I made the best of my way towards home.

It was a dreigh walk that. I was weak and faint in body; and oh, but my heart was heavy! If I had been a woman, I should have willingly given way to it and sat down by the roadside and wept. I was bringing disappointment and sorrow to my poor mother. She would comfort me, I knew, but she would feel my failure keenly; and it was a total failure, I feared. I was not fitted to preach, —I had not courage for it. I felt certain it would be the same as to-day every time I entered a pulpit. I had mistaken a mere natural inclination for an inward call. Eight years of study were thrown away; for the honour of being one of God's labourers in His pleasant vineyard of Scotland was assuredly not intended for me.

Much of my despondency arose, no doubt, from an empty stomach and an exhausted frame, for *I* had scarcely broken bread that day.

When I reached the town I stole through by-

ways to our house. I was afraid of meeting acquaintances; above all, I dreaded seeing the Carrutheresses, lest my looks should betray my misfortune. But I met no one on our stair when I crept wearily up it. I could not look Nelly in the face when she opened the door; and when she said, "Eh, sirs! Mr. Matthew, can this really be you the nicht, and lookin' sae like a ghost?" I made no answer, but went straight into the parlour. My mother was in her own room, as usual on Sabbath evenings. She came immediately, on Nelly informing her of my arrival, and found me seated in the big chair, with my elbows on my knees and my face concealed in my hands.

"Matthew, my dear, what ails you?" she said, in a trembling voice, as she laid her hand upon my shoulder.

"Mother, I fear I have mistaken my trade," I answered, thinking it best to speak plainly.

"No, no, Matthew—do not say that!" said my poor mother, who guessed what had happened; "it's just been want of nerve, and time will mend that."

"I do not think it will mend it, mother," I said,

looking sorrowfully up in her face ; and then I saw how pale she had got, and what a cruel disappointment I had brought to her, not merely now, but for her whole future life.

“ How was it, Matthew ? Tell me all about it,” she said, drawing a chair close beside me, and taking one of my hands in hers. And I told her everything that I have set down here.

She made no comments on what she had heard, but clapping me kindly on the back, she rose and went to the cupboard, and poured a little whiskey (which she always kept in the house as medicine) into a glass, which she brought me, along with a biscuit. She made me take it, and watched me as I did so.

“ How do you feel now, Matthew ? ” she then asked.

“ Better,” I answered ; and I certainly did feel better than I was.

“ Matthew,” she said, confidently, “ if those three cutties had not been there, and if you had taken your breakfast—which no man can preach wanting—it’s my belief you would have got on as well as your neighbours.”

"Do you really think so, mother?" I said, with somewhat lightened spirits. A minister's wife has great experience in these things, and my mother had more than most.

"I am sure of it, my dear. And now I'll get your tea, with a rasher of the Culdees loch bacon, for there's nothing else in the house."

How tender and loving is a mother! My mother's soothing words and kind ministrations were like a healing balm to my distressed and wounded spirit. She would not even express disappointment, lest it should pain me, but persisted that the morbid state of my feelings had made me exaggerate my failure. With the paper before me I was sure to succeed next time; and I began to admit a hope that she might be right.

Nelly brought in the tea-things with a tear in her eye, and she tried in her own way to encourage me too. She had heard in our own country side of various ministers who had almost "stuck" when preaching their first sermon, and yet had become powerful preachers afterwards.

"There was auld Mr. Router," she said, "for ane. The first time he preached not a soul in the kirk

kent what he said except the precentor beside him. And yet, during the coarse o' his ministry, they say he dang the leaves out o' four Bibles, and broke the sides o' twa pulpits wi' perfect birr. Live an' learn, Mr. Matthew—we maun a' live an' learn ! A bairn hasna the pith o' a grown-up man, and ye're but a bairn at the preaching yet."

And truly, what with their encouragement and the tea, I was greatly consoled and strengthened. Though when Miss Betty after worship returned her usual thanks for edification, I felt my face redden as I remembered the little cause I had given to the Kirkland folk that day to make me a similar compliment.

My mother prudently advised me to keep my own counsel.

"'It's an ill bird'—you know the byword, Matthew," she said, significantly.

And truly I followed her advice.

CHAPTER XV.

CLERICAL INCIDENTS.—MY TUTORSHIP.

MY second attempt at preaching was more successful. I officiated for various ministers both in town and country during the first six months after I was licensed, but never again at Kirklands, and for long did I jink Mr. Balbirnie on the street, so much afraid was I of his jokes.

I was sometimes paid for preaching—and truly “the labourer is worthy of his hire”—but these occasions might be called “gaudie” ones, they so seldom occurred. Many a time have I travelled considerable distances, to the detriment of my shoes and garments—and black cloth is dear to buy and quick to wear—and not got so much in return for my services as to pay for a seat on a coach. And, indeed, I sometimes found that those ministers who were glibest in their professions of friendship were more apt than others to forget

the preacher's guinea when the Monday morning arrived.

My greatest disappointment in this respect was from Dr. Marrables, then minister of Beltane. He got Mr. Kemp to introduce me to him at the time of the General Assembly, for Mr. Kemp kept open house for ministers during its sitting. And really Dr. Marrables was so smiling, affable, and soft-speaking—he was called Beau Marrables in his young days—that I was wonderfully taken with him. He seemed to conceive quite a friendship for me at first sight ; and when, after some pleasant conversation on church affairs, he asked me if I could find it convenient to preach for him on Sabbath week, as some business would detain him in town for several days after the rising of the Assembly, and hinder his pulpit preparations, I was happy to have it in my power to oblige so fatherly and courteous a man ; besides, I felt as sure of my guinea as if it was already in my pocket.

Beltane was on the line of the canal, and I went by the boat. Dr. Marrables himself was waiting for me at the landing-place, and we walked to-

gether to the manse, which stood on the side of a hill commanding a view of the canal for several miles. So great was Dr. Marrables' politeness that he even offered to carry my little travelling-bag for me—but probably he anticipated that I would not permit him. He was so pleasant and attentive all the evening that I quite enjoyed his company. I was not surprised that he was so popular in society; for to hear him speak, even to his own servants, was sufficient to show that if there was a good man and a Samaritan on earth, it was he, Dr. Marrables. I could not help opening all my heart to him, and consulting him on various matters, and he seemed as interested in me as if I had been his own son, calling me repeatedly his “dear young friend,” and expressing an earnest desire to serve me if ever it was in his power.

I have seldom passed so agreeable a time, for everything about the manse was in a handsome and liberal style, even to the keeping of a chaise—the doctor having married a fortune for his second wife. He must needs convoy me to the boat, too, on the Monday morning, so great was his attention; and, taking leave of Mrs. Marrables, who was a

pleasant lady, though considerably older than himself, and of his two young daughters by the first marriage, we set off for the landing-place. We had not to wait long for the boat. When it arrived the doctor shook hands with me, and, as I fully expected, left something in my palm. He then pressed my hand again, smiling most benevolently, as if he rejoiced in making me such a propine. He then would help me assiduously into the boat, like one who wished not to be thanked, with a final "God bless you, my dear young friend!" that went to my heart. And as the boat glided away, I looked back at him with glistening eyes, and thought, "Truly that man is an Israelite indeed!"

It was not till a winding of the canal hid his figure from me, that I opened the silk paper in which he had genteelly folded the supposed guinea. Lo and behold! it was only a shilling—intended, no doubt, to pay my passage by the boat.

It was a sore mortification, for the guinea would have been seasonable, and I was entitled to it. However, I never was so easily taken in again by fine words and high-sounding professions, which I

afterwards found out Dr. Marrables was notorious for. But I was often worse off than with him—getting neither pay nor kindly treatment. Ministers would sometimes forget that they had once been probationers themselves, and display considerable arrogance to the humble Levite, who, though he served in the sanctuary, was yet not of their order. Or again, when the minister could not be found fault with, perhaps his wife and family would be high and unsocial. Many a young probationer, especially if of humble parentage and as yet lacking the polish of good society, but modest and unpretending, has had cause to complain of inhospitable treatment from the families of the beneficed ministers of Scotland. But, as I have already intimated, there are bright exceptions to this, and many a kindly manse, besides the one I was born in, have I sojourned in.

By Mr. Kemp's advice I now looked about me for a tutorship. A man in those "moderate" days in which my early life happed, had little chance of a living without patronage; and though I determined with myself never to force myself upon an unwilling congregation, it was undoubtedly for my

interest to be connected with some family of distinction. After some delay and various disappointments, Mr. Kemp—blessings on his memory! he was truly a father to me—obtained an engagement for me in the family of Mr. Gordon, of Inveruven, a gentleman of large property in a Highland district, and I was to enter upon my duties in the spring.

It was a heavy thought to me, parting from my mother for so long a time, as I should have to leave her in a manner solitary; for though she had some kind friends in Edinburgh, she had no relation but Cousin Braidsute, whom I could not count upon. I knew, too, that she would fret herself about me when I was separated from her; she did not about Archie, except during the time of the war, which was now over; but Archie and I were so different. She knew how much I needed indulgence and consideration, and what a little thing discouraged me. All this weighed even now upon her mind, and she was not convinced that Mr. Kemp's plan would be the best for me in the end. To me my path of duty was clear, for it was high time that I should relieve my mother of the

burden of my maintenance. We had little discussion upon the subject, but I overheard her express her mind on it to Nelly, and she did it very strongly.

“It’s a weary life, a tutor’s in a great family, Nelly,” she said; “he’s neither one of the family, nor one of the servants, and is therefore thought little of by either. He sits, no doubt, at the laird’s table, except perhaps when there’s company; but he must leave it with the cloth, and he must not show his face in the lady’s drawing-room unless he is specially invited there; and he’s in great luck if he gets a cup of tea in his own room, for it’s as likely as not that no servant will take the trouble of bringing it to him, especially when there’s company in the house; and Matthew is so fond of his tea. Then the bairns may be spoilt and ill brought up, and plague his heart out, and he without a friend to speak to about any trouble. And maybe Mr. Gordon may not help him to a kirk after all.”

“’Deed, mem,” said Nelly, “I am sure Mr. Matthew will never hae onything to say to that sinfu’ patronage.”

“It’s easy speaking, Nelly,” I heard my mother

answer: "I like patronage as little as you, and Matthew's not the lad to intrude himself into a parish against the wishes of the people; but he may get both a presentation and a harmonious call, like his father before him, and that's enough surely to satisfy any man's conscience. But what will it all avail if a cold settles down on his chest? I hope there may be some motherly Christian woman of a housekeeper at Inveruven, who will see to his getting a basin of gruel at night when that weary hoarseness comes on; but he will never ask for it, and nobody, you may be sure, will think of nursing him."

"I know that I shall never get such a nurse as you, mother, go where I may," said I, looking in at the kitchen door, where my mother was ironing my neckcloths, which she would never trust to Nelly; and indeed, her nicety about such things was out of the common.

"I did not know that you were within hearing, Matthew," she said, tenderly; "but wait awhile till you get a kirk and a wife, my dear, and you will think less of your mother's nursing."

"I can never do that, mother," I said, "and I

want no wife while you are to the fore." (I was young then, and the mere mention of such a thing made me shamefaced.) "But you must not be so desponding about me, mother; you should rather think how pleasant it will be if, through Mr. Gordon's interest, I get one of those quiet country parishes like our own, where you and I and Nelly might pass our lives in peace and godliness; though I should be grieved to part with the Carrutheresses."

When I said this my mother gave me a strange look, which struck me at the time, though I did not understand it; but she only answered, "Well, my dear, I will try not to be desponding; and things may be different at Inveruven from some great houses that I have heard of. I would not have said what I did if I had thought you could have heard me."

And so the matter ended, and it was never again alluded to.

I was greatly vexed, too, about the Carrutheresses. I knew they would miss me. No more walks, no more posies, no more pleasant talks and readings would there be for them after I was gone. The

poor things' faces grew visibly sad when I told them what was to happen.

"We shall miss you very much, Mr. Matthew," said Jeanie, with the tear in her eye; "you have been so kind to us that I don't know how we shall get on without you now."

I was sorry and yet gratified to hear this.

"Do you think Mr. Gordon is likely to get you a kirk, Mr. Matthew?" asked Alison.

"I am told he has one in his gift, Alison," I said; "but there may be no vacancy there for many years; and even if there should, I might not be acceptable either to the laird or the people."

"I think you would," she said, earnestly, "when once they were fully acquainted with you: they would learn to like you very much, I know, Mr. Matthew, for there are few people, I should think, so kind and patient as you are."

I was surprised and affected by her words and manner.

"Is the minister an old man?" she again asked.

I shook my head at her, and Jeanie, with a smile to her sister, said;—

“We should never look out for dead men’s shoon.”

I left home for the Highlands with an anxious heart. My parting with my mother was very sorrowful, and she and Nelly were both in tears. Even Miss Betty was moved when bidding me farewell the previous evening; on which occasion she with much form presented me with an old moth-eaten scarf to tie round my neck when travelling, as a keepsake—which my mother privately took possession of, intending to bestow it upon the first beggar-woman that came to the door.

I had never been more than a night or two from home in my life, except during my yearly visits to Adam. I was shy and reserved among strangers, and so felt ill at ease about this untried situation on which I was about to enter. Inveruven, no doubt, would be a great house, where the style of living would be very different to what I had been accustomed, and I was somewhat apprehensive that my ignorance of fashionable manners might expose me to derision. As to the bairns I was to teach—being two boys and one little missy—I was

quite easy about them, for I have always had a knack of getting on with children.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when the coach set me down at Inveruven lodge gate. It was situated in a most picturesque country, the road for some miles having wound among heathy mountains, or between banks covered with silver birches, pine-trees, and oak coppice, and often crossing bridges, beneath which brown streams brawled and struggled with the great stones which their floods had at some period deposited there. And truly it was a kittle road to travel on the top of a coach, for it was up hill and down dale without cessation. I was thankful when my journey came to an end, and I found myself standing scathless on the firm ground once more; though the next moment a sense of strangeness and loneliness came over me, and my heart sank at the near prospect of meeting my employers.

The woman at the lodge directed me to walk on to the house, pointing up a long, dark avenue, and promised to send my luggage when her husband, who was one of the gardeners, returned from his work. I proceeded, therefore, through

a stately pine plantation which skirted either side of the avenue for half a mile. The trees were very large, with great sweeping branches that touched the ground, and some of them were of a species that I was unfamiliar with. I enjoyed the stillness and seclusion of this part of the avenue at first, but was glad, however, when I emerged from the monotonous gloom and confinement of the wood. Beyond it was a fair spreading park, sprinkled with large ornamental trees, and gradually sloping upwards to the hills which, in the fading evening light, were indistinct and misty. The avenue was of great length. It was a delicious walk, full of variety and unexpected views. At this hour it was peculiarly silent and solitary, and the pine woods which encircled the park on three sides wafted an aromatic fragrance all around.

At last I perceived the house at a short distance, for the groups of trees through which the avenue wound had concealed it from me till then. It was delightfully situated, and seemed a large modern building, resembling, though on a grander scale, Mr. Kennedy's mansion of Hallcraigs.

Separating it on one side from the park was an ornamental shrubbery or flower-garden, protected from the inroads of the sheep by a wire fence and gate. In trying to open the latter I awkwardly let the snick fall from my fingers, making a clink that resounded, I thought, through the whole place, and disconcerted me till I found it had attracted no one's attention. I was very nervous by this time, and would gladly have been back in my mother's parlour. I kept speculating what kind of reception I should get—whether Mr. and Mrs. Gordon would be frank and gracious or stately and condescending. And, truly, I felt as if the building before me was one of the enchanted castles in the bairns' fairy tales, the adventure of entering which had fallen to my lot, and where I should probably encounter giants and ogres—of a moral kind at least. I had nothing of the hero about me, and would willingly have eschewed the risk. My feet trailed along the gravel as I approached the door, and the sound of my own footsteps distressed me.

My ring at the house-bell was a modest one—as I knew a tutor's should be; and as there was

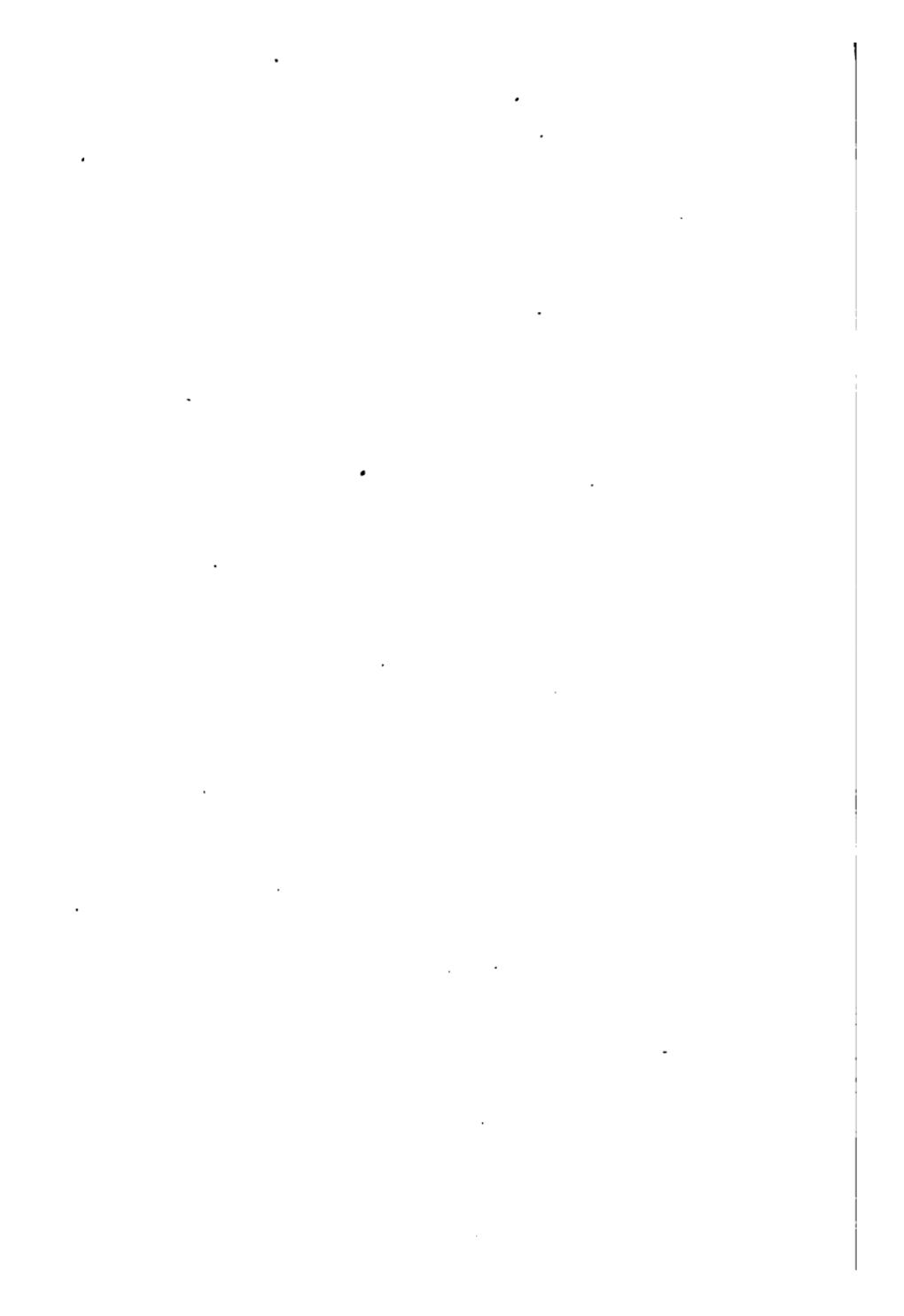
company there that day, it was some time before it was attended to. The door was at last opened by a grand-looking man-servant—he must have stood six feet on his stocking soles; and, indeed, as he looked down on me from the additional elevation of a higher step, and inquired my business, I was somewhat overawed. He was not an ill creature, Jamie Willison, however; but doubtless he was a little out of temper at the time, as the best of servants will be when there is a pressure upon them. I managed to make him understand that I was Mr. Morrison, the tutor, on which he said, “Oh!” as if he had forgot that such a person was expected. He said nothing more, but held open the door in a way that showed me he wished me to lose no time in entering, in which I gratified him. A smart-looking servant-girl appearing that moment in the hall, he handed me over to her guidance.

There seemed a considerable bustle in the house, and I heard a murmur of mixed voices from some room near me. The lass led me through the entrance-hall, on the floor of which were numerous deerskins, spread at intervals over

the black and white marble flags which paved it, and which were arranged in the form of lozenges. On the walls, too, were several deers' heads, with wonderfully branching horns, and some ancient armour and weapons. They arrested my eye immediately, for I have rather an antiquarian turn. She tripped up a wide staircase before me, then along a handsomely-carpeted passage, then up another stair, and so round to the back of the house, where she showed me into a plain but comfortably-furnished parlour, which she said was the tutor's room. Some pine-cones and peats were laid in order in the grate, and she soon had a fire blazing, the warmth and fragrance of which were very grateful.

I had no need to ask for tea ; the lass, who was a silver-tongued Englishwoman, left the room, but quickly reappeared with the tea-things, and I thanked her most gratefully for her attention. And as I sat drinking my tea and eating a bit of cold chicken and ham beside the bright cone and peat fire, I wished that my good mother could see me, to set her mind at ease about my comforts.

When the lass came to remove the things, I asked her whether it was likely that I should see any of the family that night. On learning that Mr. and Mrs. Gordon were engaged with company from the neighbourhood, and that the children's bedtime was come, I supposed I should not,—and being shown my bedroom, which was next door to the parlour, after writing to my mother of my safe arrival and comfortable beginning, I went to bed, being much fatigued with my long open-air journey.



CHAPTER XVI.

MY TUTORSHIP CONTINUED.

WHEN I awoke the following morning the sun was shining sweetly in at my chamber window. It was seven o'clock by my watch ; and, remembering that tutors must not be lie-a-beds, I got up.

Raising my window blind when I was dressed, what a lovely prospect did my eyes rest upon ! A half-circle of richly wooded hills, with a range of higher and more rugged heights behind, swept within a quarter of a mile of this side of the house. The morning mists, with a glory upon them, were ascending from the intervening glens, and as they glided up the lofty hillsides, folding and unfolding themselves in endless evolutions, glimpses of rifts ploughed by winter torrents, and of lonely grey peaks, would suddenly appear, and as suddenly vanish. There was a charm and

mystery about these momentary views ; and for some minutes my eye eagerly watched for new discoveries. What a pleasure it would be climbing these heights, and exploring all their nooks and recesses, in which specks of snow were still gleaming ! A green slope on which cattle were feeding, separated the hills from the stables, which were partly concealed from the house by luxuriant evergreens. The shrubs were glittering in the sunshine, as if rain had fallen on them during the night and was not yet absorbed. It was the latter end of March ; everything had a green vigorous look ; and as I threw up the window and bent out, I saw that a climbing rose-tree on the wall was already in bud. The pure, bracing mountain air, which came sweeping in at the open window, seemed to sweeten my blood and lighten my spirits, strange as I felt in this new scene.

I was in the schoolroom by eight o'clock, but no one came near me for half an hour. Then the door was slightly opened, and a child's face peeped in. I smiled, and invited it to enter ; but it hastily slipped away. However, in a few minutes the children were brought to me by an elderly

nurse. They were well-grown, comely children : the eldest about ten ; and the little Missy, who was the youngest, only five. They were shy at first, but in less than half an hour we were good friends ; Missy seated herself upon my knee, and the boys told me all about their dogs and ponies. I thought it better to get well acquainted with them before I spoke of lessons ; besides, I had not yet learned Mr. and Mrs. Gordon's mind anent them.

James Willison, the butler, summoned us at nine o'clock to the library, where the family assembled for prayers. It was on the ground-floor, as were all the other public rooms. Mr. and Mrs. Gordon and a young lady were in the room. I was received politely, and felt less nervous than I had expected. Mr. Gordon was a fine figure of a man, but there was something cold and repelling in his air and manner. Mrs. Gordon was a comely lady, plump and short, with a pleasant voice and way. The other lady, whom Mrs. Gordon briefly introduced to me as Miss Tulloch, and who was seated somewhat behind backs, neither spoke nor came forward when her

name was mentioned, but made me a slight curtsey. A troop of servants, both male and female, entered the room almost immediately after me, arranging themselves on chairs on either side of the door—and I found I was to be chaplain as well as tutor.

Breakfast was served in the dining-room,—a well-proportioned, lofty room, as were all the chief apartments of the house. Mrs. Gordon readily entered into conversation with me during the meal ; but Mr. Gordon either looked at papers or was silent. Miss Tulloch made the tea and coffee ; and from that circumstance, and the little, or rather the want of attention of the master and mistress of the house towards her, I conjectured that she was either a lady's companion or a poor relation. I was not much taken with her appearance, and from the coldness of Mrs. Gordon's manner to her I could see already that she was no favourite of that lady's.

The lessons began after breakfast. I found the children agreeable companions. They were not by-ordinary clever, being fonder, like the generality of young folks, of their play than of their

books ; but they were willing to learn, because I promised, if pleased with their diligence, to be their playfellow when out of doors. Little Missy began her alphabet this day ; and the little thing took such a fancy to me that there was no getting her to stay in the nursery.

And here I should like to say a word anent the management of bairns. I have ever found it easiest to rule them through their affections, for gaining these is conquering the citadel. I believe more bairns are spoiled by severity than by over-indulgence. Love never really injured any one ; want of it, I fear, has stunted and withered many a generous and promising disposition. I have certainly encountered tempers and wills that required a firm hand to control them ; but even these, I found, could be subdued by patient, judicious, and steady kindness. I have been often pained to see how children are driven and lectured by both parents and teachers. There is a cry about undutiful sons and daughters in these days ; I should like to know what was the early training of such. I have known parents with so little sympathy for childhood as to be incapable of

taking a toddling child on their knee to tell it a story; who took no notice of their children's games except to complain of the noise and banish them from the room; and yet, because these children obeyed the instincts of their nature and sought that amusement from home which was denied them there, these parents would severely punish and threaten them. What loving memories could such mismanaged creatures have of parents and home in after days?

I was over all the policy with the boys in the afternoon, and was introduced to their ponies and other pets. I thought it would be my own fault if I was not comfortable here; the only thing I might occasionally miss would be society, for of course I did not expect that Mr. and Mrs. Gordon would make me their companion. Her frankness had a certain stateliness with it, sufficient to warn me not to presume upon it; and though Mr. Gordon was polite, he had spoken to me with that tone which great men use towards their inferiors. When I was walking with the boys, I saw him at a distance with his dogs and gun; but I had no more communication with him or his lady till

dinner. I then experienced the humiliation that my mother had alluded to ; for after the cloth was removed I got a plain hint to withdraw. I never needed it to be repeated, though certainly, especially when strangers were present, I felt it mortifying enough.

The children were with their parents in the drawing-room during the evening, but I was not invited there. However, I did not miss my tea, the housekeeper sending it to my room. I spent some time in reading, though my thoughts often wandered from my book to my mother in her solitary parlour, and to Jeanie and Alison Carruthers at their seams.

I soon grew accustomed to the ways of the family. It was a very regular house, Inveruven, and the servants were obliging and civil. They had a very active and respectable person, Mrs. Anderson, over them as housekeeper. She was of a religious turn of mind, and because I was a preacher of the gospel she respected me for my office, and let me want for nothing ; but, indeed, I have been much indebted to female kindness all my life.

I exceedingly enjoyed my walks through that beautiful country, which was all new to me. I had my yearnings after home, however, particularly in the evenings. I was not one of the family, though I sat at their table ; and while my bodily wants were well supplied, those of my spirit were not. I missed my mother's kindly interest in all I did and felt. It did not do to make a companion of Jamie Willison, the butler ; and Mr. Gordon never forgot for a moment that I was the tutor. Besides, he was not a man who cared for book learning ; his mind was completely given to shooting and such like country sports, and there were several gentlemen in the neighbourhood who had a similar turn, and came much about him. He was not forced, therefore, to seek my society for lack of other, and I very seldom saw him except at meals, or at a distance out of doors. He would sometimes ask me a few questions about the boys' studies, but he left the superintendence of all such matters to his wife.

Mrs. Gordon was, upon the whole, good-humoured and affable, though somewhat capricious in her behaviour to me. She had been a spoiled

bairn, I think, for she had been an only one, and an heiress besides. She had serious impressions at times, and had always a respect for religion, but she would fain have served two masters. We saw her oftener in the schoolroom, and she was franker with me when there was little stirring in the neighbourhood ; but when there was any pleasureing to be had—and as the season advanced there was plenty—truly there were no more applications to me for a time to solve religious doubts and difficulties for her.

She was born in England, and till her marriage had been a member of the Episcopal Church, to which she was still warmly attached. That was only natural, and I never drew comparisons between our churches ; for, though considering our own simple form of worship and church government more in harmony with the spirit of the New Testament, I knew that spiritual life, not outward forms, was the only essential thing. Besides, her Church had produced many great and solid divines, whose works I had profited by. In both communions there are doubtless individuals who would have every wheel to run in their own narrow

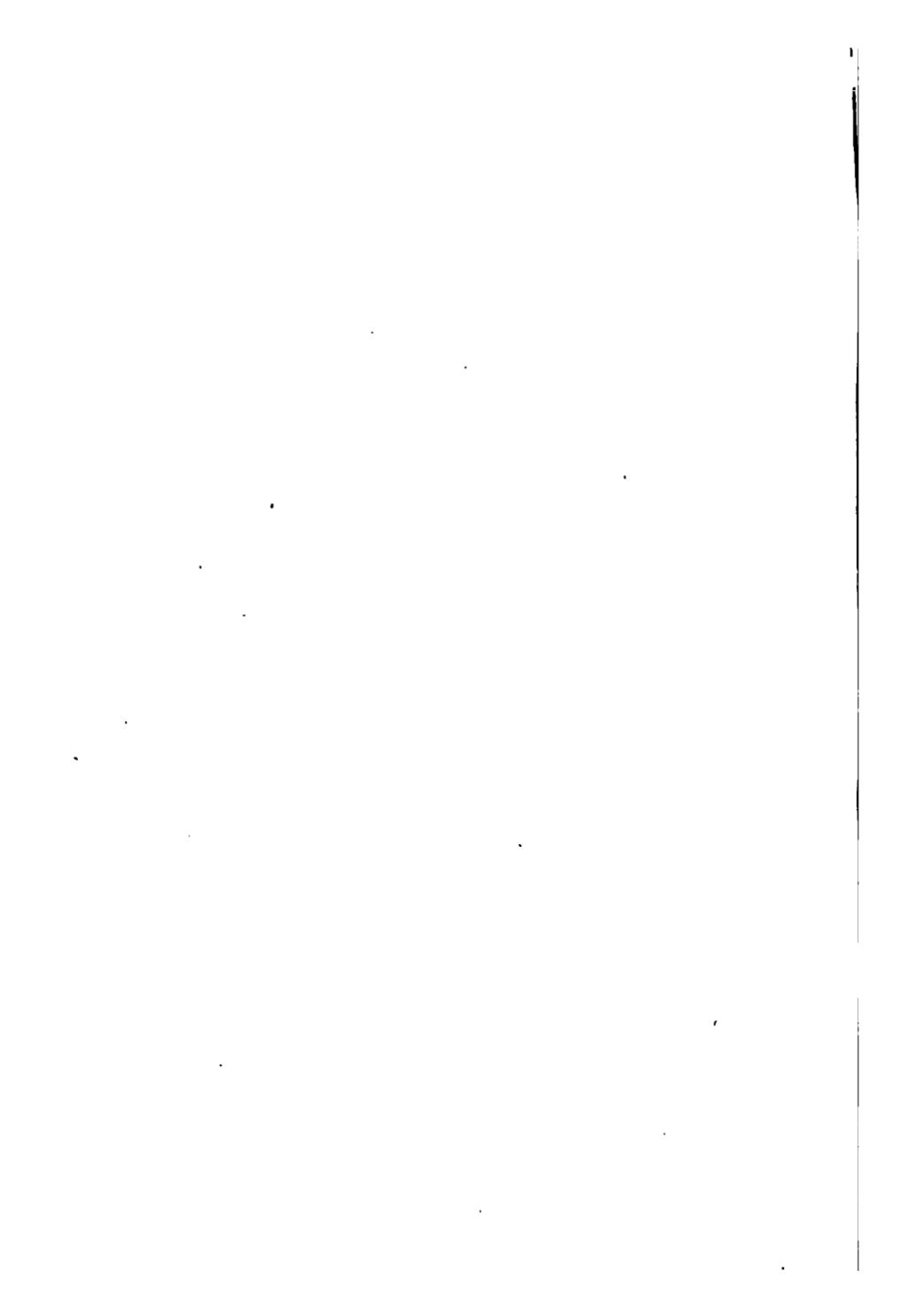
groove, and would compress every spirit into their limited measure—as if spirit could be compressed.

She was an amiable lady, however, and paid me more attention than, I believe, often falls to the lot of tutors. She liked my method with the children, and I was allowed the uncontrolled management of them. I was a great favourite with them, poor lambs; and this, of course, had its influence upon Mrs. Gordon, who was a most affectionate mother.

The boys and I had many excursions together, they riding their ponies and I walking beside them; and in this way we explored almost the whole of that romantic district. A half-holiday spent among the hills was a great enjoyment to each of us. We were allowed to carry our dinner with us; and these simple repasts on the heather were far more relished by me than those I partook of at the laird's table.

My mother was right in her estimation of a tutor's position. There are some humiliations which, though trivial in character, are hard to bear. I was a minister's son, and had received the education of a gentleman, and yet I was treated by Mr. Gordon as a mere privileged inferior—

condescendingly stationed beneath the salt. I should have preferred entire exclusion from his table. But for such petty mortifications, which I am ashamed to have mentioned, I should have been very contented at Inveruven. I had the goodwill of the household; and though Mr. Gordon was a proud man, he would sometimes stoop to show that he respected my character, and was satisfied with the manner in which I performed my duties.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE MANSE AT INVERUVEN.

I HAD not been long at Inveruven before I waited on the parish clergyman. It was only a becoming attention from a probationer of the kirk residing within his bounds. He received me very cordially. He was an elderly man, lusty and heavy in body, which unfitted him to be so active as his very scattered flock required of him; but he was a worthy individual, and had their welfare sincerely at heart. I preached for him occasionally, greatly to the delight of my pupils in the front gallery. I soon became very intimate with Mr. Macbriar, and often made the manse a halting-place in our walks, in which he would sometimes join. He liked society, and there was not much of it at Ballanclutha, except among the great lairds. He was a married man, but had no family. His wife was an inoffensive, good sort of woman,

but she was no companion to him. Not that she had been inferior to him in social position, for she was come of good blood and had received gentle nurture ; but, as the proverb says, "you cannot make a silken purse out of a sow's ear," and the nurture was thrown away on poor Mrs. Macbriar.

They were disgracefully slatternly in their ways at the manse. The minister was constantly grumbling about the defective accommodation there—and it had the usual inconveniences of old houses—but yet they made little use of what they had, sitting habitually in a small dingy den which the minister called his study, and which was so littered with Mrs. Macbriar's belongings, as well as his, that it was not easy to find a chair free to sit upon. Such a confusion of books, old newspapers, stockings—Mrs. Macbriar was always mending stockings—and woman's gear, I never saw before or since in one place. They were very prejink and ceremonious, however, when they received company ; so that none but those who got far ben, like me, had any idea of the manner in which they lived when alone.

It makes me laugh yet to think of the flurry into which an unexpected visit from me threw them one night. I had never called at so late an hour; and when my knock came to the door they thought some friends from a distance had arrived; and they were greatly consternated, for they were sitting at their supper in the den, and there was no fire lighted in any other room.

I had taken a fancy, the night being dry and frosty, to saunter down to the manse, to which there was a short cut through one of the plantations. It must have been as far on in the year as the beginning of November. I thought I was never to get admittance into the manse, and at last would have gone away, but that I distinctly heard through the closed door such a murmur of voices and hurrying of feet as to cause a fear that something was wrong in the family. When the door was at length opened, the servant-lass who appeared was so scant of breath that she could scarcely answer my question if all was well and the minister to be seen.

The minister and Mrs. Macbriar, she said, were in the dining-room; and she showed me in there,

where the pair were sitting almost as breathless as the servant. And no wonder, for the minister had had to change his coat and put on his wig —there was a red Kilmarnock cowl lying on the study floor when we adjourned there—and his wife had evidently been comforting herself with her nightcap also, and had tied on her front of false curls in a hurry and without the looking-glass, for it was all ajee (crooked). She had put on her best cap, too, which agreed ill with her greasy stuff gown and black bombazette apron, which, as usual, were speckled over with ends of grey worsted thread.

But the chief absurdity was that they were seated in state, in opposite arm-chairs, by the side of an empty black fireplace—for of course there had been no time to light a fire—making believe as if they had been spending the evening there, and trying to look at their ease in spite of the cold formal room and their red faces and panting chests. Poor Mrs. Macbriar had evidently a pair of old bauchles (worn-out shoes) on her feet, which she was endeavouring to hide under her chair—at least, I judged so from the uneasy constrained posture

in which she sat. A pair of newly-lighted candles in the best candlesticks were on the table, and they burned so dimly that neither the minister nor his wife recognised me till I spoke—though, coming from the darkness without into the lighted room, what I have described was quite visible to me.

“Dear me! what’s the matter with you both!” I could not help exclaiming, so struck was I with their ludicrous appearance, sitting like a couple of play-actors in the seldom-used room.

“Hoots! it’s just Mr. Morrison,” said Mrs. Macbriar, in her usual manner—and up she bounced; and then, sure enough, I saw the bauchles, and did not wonder that she had hidden her feet.

“My dear sir, my dear sir,” exclaimed the minister, evidently much relieved, “is it really you? Why, when your knock came to the door we thought it was some of the Spittal folk come unexpectedly upon us, as they did once before! If we had known who it really was we should not have troubled ourselves. Jenny, take away the candles, and bring another toddy tumbler to the study. Mrs. Macbriar and I were just taking a bit of supper there, Mr. Morrison; and I was sitting

in my duffle gown at my ease: come your ways ben and join us."

And puffing and blowing, honest man—for he was very heavy, and had been hurried beyond his ordinary—he led the way to his study, glad to get a companion over his toddy—in which he was always moderate, however. And truly the study, with its guttering, unsnuffed candles, dirty table-cloth, and general *hashiness*, was a striking contrast to the prejink company room into which I had scared them. I had a hearty laugh to myself over this scene on my way home. It was singular that a man possessed of good abilities and considerable shrewdness, and even humour, should not have dreaded exposing himself to ridicule by such slovenly habits; but few men are sensible of their own foibles. As he intimated, they were upon familiar terms with me—I was within the pale of the kirk—and there is a kind of freemasonry among ministers.

Mr. Macbriar sometimes dined at Inveruven, but not oftener than the laird could decently help; and Mrs. Gordon could seldom be troubled with Mrs. Macbriar's company. I believe it was chiefly

on account of this that Miss Tulloch went so much to the manse. That young woman, in a quiet, secret kind of way, was always putting herself in opposition to Mrs. Gordon—at least so it seemed to me when I had been long enough in the family to observe things—liking the people she disliked, and expressing opinions contrary to what she held. There was evidently a smouldering heart-burning between them, though it never broke out into actual flame.

Miss Tulloch's position in the family was for long a puzzle to me. She had no particular charge that I could see, except that she made the tea, and both Mr. and Mrs. Gordon would occasionally send messages by her to the upper servants. She could be no lady's companion, for Mrs. Gordon would not have kept about her a person she so evidently disliked. She never appeared when there was company; and this, in addition to some other slights put upon her, excited my wonder, for she had early taken an opportunity of informing me that she was a near relation of the laird's. But at last Mr. Macbriar gave me some information which made it all plain.

She was a full niece of Mr. Gordon's, though the family never openly acknowledged the relationship. Mr. Gordon's only sister had been somewhat spoiled and headstrong; moreover, she showed herself not over-nice for a young lady of family, for she made a runaway match with her father's own ploughman: there was a home-farm at Inveruven. The man, no doubt, thought he was making his fortune; but the discovery of his daughter's folly threw the old laird into a perfect frenzy, and he disowned her from that hour, commanding that her name should never be mentioned in his presence. A sum of money, however, was given to them on condition of their leaving the country immediately, and the ill-matched pair went to America, where it was said that the fellow used her miserably ill.

Years afterwards, when the old laird, whose resentment had never abated, was gathered to his fathers, she made her way back to Scotland—a widow, with one lassie bairn. From that time to her death she never ceased persecuting the present laird, her brother, with begging letters. He was afraid she would come to Inveruven, and he sup-

plied her with money, but he would never see her. She was a thorn in his side for years, being never out of difficulties—her experience of poverty having failed to teach her good management. At her earnest entreaty when on her deathbed, he was prevailed upon to visit her; and he was then so moved by the change in her appearance—when he had last seen her she was a gay, dashing young lady, and he a schoolboy—that he was induced to promise he would befriend her daughter, Miss Tulloch. She was at that time a young woman of eighteen, and not altogether uneducated, though not capable of earning her bread by teaching or anything of that kind. He did not know how to dispose of her; so his heart being open at the time, as I have said, he brought her home after the funeral to his young wife.

“And there she has been ever since,” added Mr. Macbriar, “though it does not need a sharp eye to see that neither the laird nor Mrs. Gordon have much goodwill to the burden. And indeed it is whispered that her living in the family has been more than once a cause of difference between them. They cannot free themselves of her, how-

ever—and between you and me, Mr. Morrison, there's rather a cross grain in the young woman herself. But I must warn you to make no allusion to the relationship—the family don't like it spoken of; and 'the least said the soonest mended,' Mr. Morrison, you understand."

This communication put me on my guard, and I was careful to say nothing about Miss Tulloch, especially to the children, that reported to their parents might create suspicions that I had got an inkling of this painful family story. The children did not like her, though she tried to ingratiate herself with them, and little Missy would struggle to get down if she took her up on her knee. I had a prejudice against her myself, I must confess, though I was sorry for her after learning her story; but she was certainly sly and designing, much given to tale-bearing, and she had an unhappy knack of fomenting quarrels among the children and servants.

It was as clear as daylight to me that her presence in the house was distasteful to both Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, and that they were displeased with her underhand ways of proclaiming her relationship to them. I daresay no visitor even of a few

days left the house without learning in some way from Miss Tulloch how nearly connected she was to the laird. If she did not see the ladies, she could see their maids. I do not understand what was her object in this, for such conduct seemed against her own interests; I can only attribute it to an unusually vain disposition and to great imprudence of character.

I learned this from Mrs. Anderson, who did not know how to act in the matter, being afraid of injuring Miss Tulloch by mentioning it to Mrs. Gordon, and yet wishing to put a stop to the gossip in the servants' hall: she thought I might be able to advise her. I could only recommend her to hint a caution to the young lady herself, which, coming from an old family servant in Mrs. Anderson's position, I felt could scarcely be resented—for I was most unwilling to be mixed up with the tittle-tattle of the household. I wondered that the laird did not board his niece somewhere at a distance from his family; but of course he had his reasons for not doing so. It would have cost him money, for one thing, and great folks as well as their inferiors have often not much of it to spare.

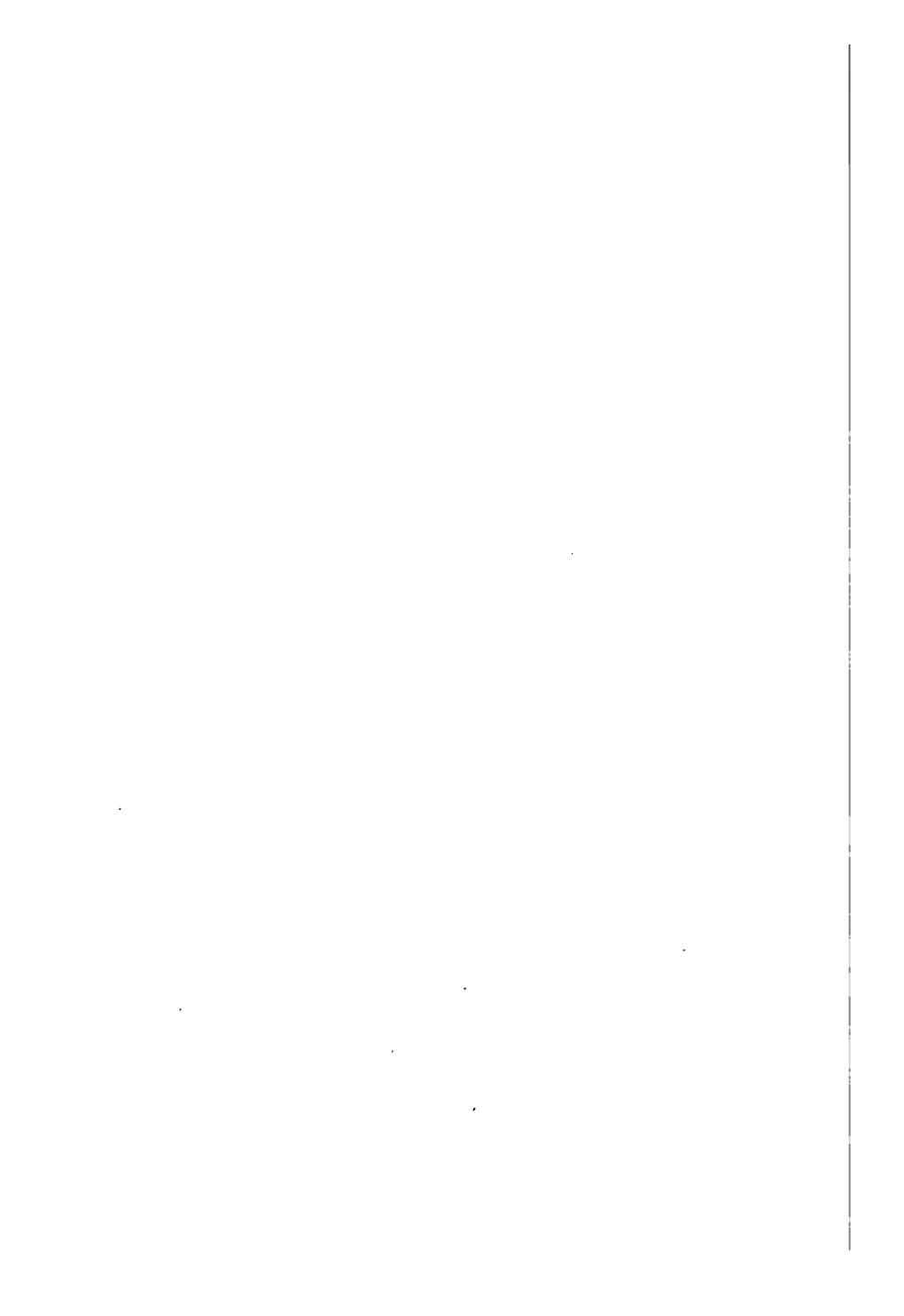
Some people, among whom was the minister, considered her well favoured. She had indeed a bouncing, buxom figure, and a florid complexion; but I could see no beauty in her. I often contrasted her in my mind with Jeanie Carruthers, for though Jeanie's face was not one to arrest the eye, its gentleness and composure and modesty made it beautiful to me. Miss Tulloch, I jealousy, took after her mother in her looks—maybe in her disposition also, for she was fond of romping and men's company. She even threw herself in my way when she could, and at last almost drove me from visiting the manse by waylaying me there. I had once to convoy her home from it. We met Mrs. Gordon unexpectedly in the plantation, and she looked so strangely at us as we came cleeking on—the young woman had taken my arm on pretext of weariness, though she looked at all times like one who could do a hard day's work—that I was sure something was in her thoughts, and I was vexed at it. And doubtless she told the laird what she had seen—indeed, I had afterwards good reason to know that she did.

I eschewed Miss Tulloch as much as I could

with manners after this ; but it was not easy to do, for she was a forward young person, thinking of herself always as the laird's niece, never as John Tulloch the ploughman's daughter, and she was very slow at the uptake. If I had not been conscious that there was nothing about me to please a woman's eye, I might really have fancied that she had a notion of me. To be sure I was almost the only unmarried man in the position of a gentleman that came in her way.

Postage was so dear in those days that my mother and I could not interchange letters as often as we wished. I sometimes got a letter from Mr. Meggat, whose friendship was not diminished by time or distance, and also from dear old Adam ; but Archie's were always to his mother, who gave me the gist of them in hers—reserving the letters for my home-coming.

I wearied for the holidays to arrive. The family invariably spent the Christmas season with Mrs. Gordon's relations in England ; and at that time I was to have the play.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A CHANGE AT THE MANSE.

THAT was a happy day on which I set my face towards home. I found my mother in good health: and oh, but she and Nelly were glad to see me!—it was like the welcome of the prodigal. What a talk my mother and I had over the fire that night, for we had nine months' events to speak of!

Miss Betty made her appearance at worship, and gave me a gracious welcome. She was the most extraordinary figure I had ever yet seen her—and all, Isabel Rae told my mother, to do me honour. “The young clergyman should be honoured—see that *you* honour him, Isabel!” she had solemnly impressed upon her handmaid. I scarcely dared venture a second look at her, for the spectacle was almost more than my gravity could stand. She had on, if I rightly remember,

a thing called a sacque—I may not have spelt the word properly, knowing little about women's garments, old-fashioned or new—which hung loosely about her tall thin figure, like a bairn's pinafore. It must have belonged to her mother, mine said, for sacques had quite gone out before Miss Betty's day.

Both Jeanie and Alison Carruthers were looking very ill. I was grieved about the girls, and wanted to get them into the fresh air; but their work had got far behind, their customers were complaining, and they shook their heads sadly when I proposed it. Alison had been ill, and I suppose the doctor's bill was not yet paid. I spent all the time I could spare from my mother and other friends with them; but there was a cloud over them which I could not dissipate. Even Jeanie was unusually depressed. She seemed to me now often absent in mind; and though she was as gentle and considerate to every one as ever, I was sure she was not happy,—that weary, ceaseless work was exhausting her spirits.

My mother pressed me to resign my situation at Inveruven when I had made out the year. She

missed me at home, she said ; and Archie, since his promotion, had sent her more money than she needed to spend. But I felt that I ought not to live on Archie's earnings, but gain my bread by my own exertions. I promised, however, that if I could get sufficient teaching in town, I would leave my present situation before the next winter.

The holidays came to a close, and once more I was on the road to Inveruven. There was snow on the ground, and we feared that the drifts would stop us ; but we got through safely to the county town where the mail stopped. There was no public coach to Inveruven at this time of year, but I was so fortunate as to get the chance of a return chaise, which set me down at the gate.

I was annoyed to find that the family were not expected for another week, and thought that Mrs. Gordon might have had the consideration to inform me of this through Mr. Kemp, if she was unaware of my address. I did not like living in the same house alone with Miss Tulloch for a whole week. Poor thing ! she must have been very dull in that large empty house in our absence ; and there was no wonder she was glad to have some one to talk

to besides the housekeeper, who was the only one of the upper servants that did not accompany the family. I would fain have been frank and easy with her, but her manners, when freed from the restraint of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon's presence, were not such as I could approve, and I shrank from her company. I went down to the manse, hoping thus to avoid her; but that was of no avail, as my former experience might have taught me, for she was a constant visitor there. Besides, the minister began, as he said, "to smell a rat," and I was afraid of his jokes. So, being determined not to cleek her home a second time, I took refuge in my bedchamber except at meal times, and employed myself in writing sermons. I feared she might take offence at this, but I think she attributed it to my bashfulness.

The family returned at the week's end, and Mrs. Gordon at breakfast next morning had the civility to apologise for neglecting to let me know in time of their prolonged stay in England, but hoped I had found things comfortable at Inveruven in their absence. And then I saw her glance at Miss Tulloch, who was demurely pouring out the tea.

I could not help colouring as I answered, which she probably observed.

We soon settled down into our usual habits. Mr. Gordon was much occupied with some county business for a time; and as the neighbourhood was very quiet at this season, we saw a good deal of Mrs. Gordon in the schoolroom. Miss Tulloch, too, began to come often there to get pens mended, but always at a different time of the day from Mrs. Gordon. I suppose she kept a journal-book, for I never saw her get a letter out of the post-bag, so she could have few to write. I was very willing to do her this trifling service, but it interrupted the lessons; and for various reasons I had rather she had sent the pens by one of the servants. How Mrs. Gordon found it out I know not—probably from the remarks of the children; but she said to me one day, in rather a peculiar tone, “What brings Miss Tulloch so much to the schoolroom of late, Mr. Morrison?” And when I answered it was to get pens mended, she exclaimed, “Pens, indeed!” in such a sharp way that I felt quite confused and uncomfortable. I saw she was seriously displeased; but I was conscious of having given her no cause,

for I could not prevent the young woman from coming to the room. No more passed ; but Mrs. Gordon was more distant in her manner to me for some days afterwards, as if she suspected me of levity unbecoming my profession and responsible situation in the house. However, things went on very quietly for some weeks, none of us anticipating the changes that were already at the door ; and I engaged myself to remain at Inveruven till the end of autumn.

About the beginning of March an event occurred that altered all our plans—namely, the awfully sudden death of poor Mr. Macbriar, the minister. He dropped down with apoplexy in his own study—struck down as with a flash of lightning at his wife's foot. It took place during the afternoon, and the news reached Inveruven while we were sitting at dinner. Jamie Willison, the butler, was called out of the room, and when he returned he went behind Mr. Gordon's chair and told him in a low voice, but we all heard him.

My first emotion was that of horror and grief, for the minister had been a worthy man, and it was but the previous day that I had seen him in

his usual health. But oh, the selfishness of the human heart ! In almost the next minute—at least, as soon as the great shock on learning the event was somewhat lessened—the thought flashed across my mind that here was a vacant living, and that Mr. Gordon was the patron of it. Such a sordid consideration, at a time when I ought only to have been solemnised by so impressive an illustration of the uncertainty of all earthly things, made me odious to myself. I felt like a criminal ; and while Mr. and Mrs. Gordon were discussing the startling event with the grave looks and tones that were fitting, I feared to raise my eyes or utter a syllable, lest my voice should betray my thoughts. I strove to banish them—stroved to think merely of the sad scene at the manse—of poor Mrs. Macbriar's distress—of the disembodied spirit that had been so suddenly summoned into the presence of its God ; but it was to little purpose. A nervous, tormenting anxiety had taken possession of my mind, and would not be banished.

I thought the moment would never arrive when it behoved me to withdraw from the table. When it did, I hastened up to the schoolroom and shut

myself in there. What a tumult of mind this sad news had wrought in me! I scarcely knew myself. I sat down after a time—for I had been pacing up and down the floor—and tried to be calm, and to understand my own sensations. I had always despised those who, for the sake of preferment, would cringe to, and bow themselves down in the dust before, a patron. Was I myself capable of this, notwithstanding? No; there was something in my breast that assured me I was not: I could not fawn on Mr. Gordon for all he had to bestow. But yet my heart beat quick when I thought of what a timely word might airt my way. Would Mrs. Gordon stand my friend?—what if I addressed myself to her! There would be claimants enow soon: at present I had the field all to myself.

Alas, alas! the poor man whose demise had created all this disorder in my mind was not yet cold in death. Oh how we push and elbow one another in this race of life! Every man is for himself, and as one falls there are hundreds ready to take his vacant place. I fear—I fear I less regretted the friend I had lost than I rejoiced in the opening prospect caused by his death. It may

be that I thought of others' interests more than of my own—of my mother's grey head finding a quiet resting-place in a home such as that we had lost; but my conscience did not acquit me.

I was glad that I did not require to meet the family again that night; there were never family prayers in the evening at Inveruven. I needed solitude and reflection to compose my mind. I sought help and direction from Him who never denies them to the sincere seeker. I left my burden with Him, fully persuaded that if it was for His glory and my good that I should be parish minister of Ballanclutha I should become so.

Though thus committing the matter to God, I did not therefore neglect the human and ordinary means in my power of ensuring success. Nor was I wronging any man, and certainly not the dead, by taking early advantage of them. Any scruple on that point would, I felt on consideration, be Quixotic. Then, as for the people, I was sure they would gladly welcome me as their minister. Without vanity, I may say that I was liked in the parish. I had visited a good deal among the people in my leisure hours, and had often been

asked to converse and pray with sick and aged folk who resided at a distance from the manse. The minister had gladly accepted my assistance for these cases, for being very corpulent, poor man, and keeping no horse—the glebe was let—long walks were a burden to him. I was not likely, therefore, to create any dissension in the kirk by getting a presentation from the patron. I felt free to make my honest and respectful petition to Mr. Gordon. If he granted it, well; if not, I trusted that I could bear the disappointment. And having reached this point, I was able in the morning to look every one in the face.

CHAPTER XIX.

I AM TEMPTED TO COMMIT SIMONY. .

THERE was not much allusion at breakfast to the recent event. Suitable inquiries and offers of assistance had been made at the manse the previous evening, I had learned from Jamie Willison. Now the subject seemed dismissed, till funeral arrangements would bring it up again. If Mr. and Mrs. Gordon suspected somewhat of my feelings, they did not show it. She was good-humoured even to Miss Tulloch this morning. A more favourable mood for the request I meant to make to her she could not have been in.

She came into the schoolroom as usual during the forenoon. After some talk about the lessons, I summoned courage to ask a few minutes' private conversation with her, and the children were sent to the nursery. In the best terms which agitation would allow me to use, I then requested her

good offices with Mr. Gordon on my behalf. She listened very graciously, and readily promised to exert her influence for me, making me a handsome compliment on my conduct in the parish and in her family; and she left me very light-hearted and hopeful as to the issue.

What a day of wind and wet that was! I was not likely to forget a day so exciting in other respects, but the tempest which raged during it has given a peculiar vividness to its recollections. I had no idea of the majesty of a Highland storm till then. It howled round every angle of the house, and shook the windows with a grasp that I feared would burst them in. I stood ir mine, and watched the scene without awestruck. The hills, except when the mist racked for a moment, were shrouded from top to bottom in impenetrable vapour; and even the smooth slope between them and the stables was often altogether obscured by the fierce smoke-like rain which swept in wild gusts across it. Down the blasts poured from Glencaird as through a funnel, and the stateliest pines, if exposed to their fury, were weak as bulrushes. They were tossed about

like playthings—half a dozen piled upon each other in some spots, their branches inextricably entangled, and their roots, with the earth and turf torn from the soil clinging to them, sticking up in the air. Mr. Gordon's woods next day were like a field of battle strewn with the dead.

It would have been easy for a fanciful imagination to picture shapes in that wildly hurrying mist. I thought of Ossian's spirits of the storm, and almost believed that I saw them. If there is any latent superstition in a mind, be sure a residence in the Highlands will bring it out. The ravages of the tempest extended even to the sheltered lawn and flower garden. The house wall, an angle of which was visible from the schoolroom window, was black with the beating rain, and entirely stripped of the climbing plants which were trained on it; while the beautifully-kept turf was strewed with twigs torn by the savage blasts from the tossed and tortured evergreens. It would take years to efface the devastation made at Inveruven that day, both gardener and forester ruefully said.

There was something truly sublime in this great

tumult of nature, and I felt a strange kind of excitement in witnessing it. We had to give up the lessons as the storm increased. It was impossible to keep either the children's or my own attention fixed upon them while the sleet flashed like lightning past the window, the wind roared so savagely in the chimney, and the very trees on the lawn screeched and groaned as if in agony. The children clung to me in terror, and I tried to soothe them by speaking of Him who holdeth the winds in the hollow of His hand, and who while on earth spoke to such a tempest as this, and lo ! there was a great calm.

The storm raged for about four hours with unabated fury ; but towards evening the blasts began to sink gradually, and at last there was only a low moaning and wailing through the woods, like that of a child whose passion is exhausted, but who still sobs involuntarily. Now that it was possible to venture out of doors with safety, I went to visit poor Mrs. Macbriar at the manse. A windy, damp walk it was, and I had more than once to climb over fallen trees which obstructed the path through the plantation. What must the higher and more

exposed woods have suffered, when the more sheltered ones were so ravaged? I found the manse standing bare, with every chimney-can off it, and the gravel in front strewn with their fragments and with broken slates. I did not ask to see Mrs. Macbriar, being informed that some of her relations had arrived that morning to keep her company.

Mr. Gordon had as yet taken no notice of my application to his wife, and I did not know whether to regard it as a bad or a good sign in a man of his proud temper. The uncertainty was agitating, but I trusted it would not continue long: nor did it, for next forenoon, while I was giving little Missy her lesson, Jamie Willison appeared, and said that Mr. Gordon wished to see me in the library. The important moment had come. My heart gave a great leap as if it would burst from my side, and for a few seconds I felt dizzy and faint. I did not know till then how stongly I dreaded disappointment. My face must have betrayed my mental agitation, and given so shrewd an observer as Jamie an inkling of the business between the laird and me; for as he followed me downstairs he whispered, "Good

luck to you, sir!" with a respectful heartiness that gratified while it surprised me.

I found Mr. Gordon engaged in writing when I entered the library. He did not raise his eyes from the paper when he desired me to be seated. I was glad enough to sit down, and I waited as composedly as it was possible in the circumstances till he should be at leisure to speak to me. As I watched his pen move so quietly over the page, I could not but contrast his coolness with my agitation, and marvel at it as something extraordinary. In a few minutes he closed and sealed his letter, and then, pushing it from him, he deliberately leaned back in his elbow-chair and looked at me for the first time.

"Mrs. Gordon has informed me of your application to her, Mr. Morrison," he formally said, without further preface.

I bowed, and tried to say something about my hope that he would see fit to take it into consideration; but I was so nervous that I doubt if I made my meaning plain. However, it mattered not.

"You are a very respectable young man, Mr.

Morrison," he continued, dropping his words slowly, as if unconscious of or indifferent to the anxiety with which I listened, "and I should be glad to further your interests. But there is another gentleman of your cloth who has somewhat stronger claims upon me than you." And here he made a full pause.

My heart sank and my hopes fled on hearing these words. It was a bitter disappointment; still I made a struggle and partly rallied from the shock. Rising from my chair—for of course I regarded the intimation that another individual had a prior and superior claim to Mr. Gordon's patronage as a dismissal of the subject—I said respectfully, "that I was far from desirous of interfering with the righteous claims of another—indeed, acknowledged that I had no claim whatever upon Mr. Gordon; but that I had hoped if the kirk had not been promised away——"

"It is not *promised*, Mr. Morrison," said Mr. Gordon, coolly interrupting me, and motioning me to resume my seat: "that is, it is not *bond fide* promised, for I could not foresee the event that has occurred; but the individual I have alluded to,

and who is, I believe, a very deserving person, may reasonably expect that any preferment in my power should be bestowed upon him. Circumstances, however, may compel me to disappoint him."

Here Mr. Gordon again paused, and it seemed to me was rather embarrassed. He took up the penknife from the desk and began to trim his nails with it, as if to avoid meeting my looks. I was in much perplexity, not knowing what his last words indicated; but there seemed a glimmer of hope in them, and I waited anxiously till he should again speak.

"The fact is, Mr. Morrison," said Mr. Gordon, suddenly laying down the knife, and rising from his seat as with the intention of ending the interview—I, of course, following his example—"the fact is, I have been led to believe that you entertain feelings of affection for a young person residing here. Indeed, I may as well acknowledge, since I presume you are already aware of it, that she is a sort of connection of this family. I cannot see any objections to this: you are a worthy young man; will probably make a useful parish minister; and here

is an opportunity of benefiting you both. Get Miss Tulloch's consent, then, Mr. Morrison," he added, in a more cordial tone than he had ever used before when addressing me, "and I promise that you shall have the presentation to Ballan-clutha living as her marriage portion." And lifting his hat and riding-whip, which lay on the table beside him, he made a hasty exit through a door that opened into a back passage in the direction of the stables.

"Good sir!—worthy sir!" I faintly called after him, but he heard me not; and I remained for some minutes standing on the spot on which he had left me, in such a state of utter dismay and bewilderment that I thought my senses were forsaking me. When I had got my ideas a little unravelled out, and had convinced myself that I had heard Mr. Gordon aright, I quitted the library, making a hurried dash up to the school, lest I should encounter Miss Tulloch, of whom I had now a perfect terror, on the road. I did not feel myself secure till I was beside the bairns, who looked astonished to see me return so scared like. "What is it, Mr. Morrison?—what is it?" they

kept asking me. I was indeed for the time in a half distracted state; and when we set to the lessons again, whether they said them ill or well, or whether they said them at all, I believe I was quite unconscious of.

At last the playtime came, and when the bairns were at their sports in the room—it was a showery day, and we could not leave the house—I was able to arrange my thoughts more composedly. Since the day I was born I had never been in such a quandary. I was like a person under the influence of an opiate, and could scarcely persuade myself that I was not dreaming. Supposed to entertain “feelings of affection” for Miss Tulloch! when, if there had been any courting at all, it was all—But it would not be good manners to conclude the sentence. My mind was more troubled at first about this notion of Mr. Gordon’s than what was more particularly the business in hand—namely, would I marry Miss Tulloch to get the kirk? This, no doubt, was the proper way to put the case; for whether I really liked Miss Tulloch or did not, would matter little to the laird if I enabled him to be rid of her. Little did I think, on applying for

the presentation, that it would be offered me on such a condition!

I stated the case to myself in this fashion. Here is a young woman who is a burden to her friends, and here is a vacant kirk: you may have the latter if you also take the former, but you cannot get the kirk without the wife. I was in no joking mood, and yet I could not help saying to myself, "You are a lucky lad, Matthew, to have a wife and a living found for you on the same day; think well of it, for such a chance is not likely to happen a second time!" But, as I have just observed, it was not a subject for jesting. As to resolving how I was to act, that was as yet out of the question. I was glad to put the matter from me at present; to postpone it till night brought the needful silence and solitude for reflection.

Such a day as I passed! What between the dread of Mrs. Gordon coming to the schoolroom to congratulate me, and expecting my thanks, or making a pretext to send Miss Tulloch there that I might have the opportunity, for which I must be wishing, of discussing our mutual prospects, or of that young woman being seized with a writing fit,

and coming of her own accord with those weary pens, I was more than half demented. "What's the matter with you, Mr. Morrison?" the boys were continually saying to me. And certainly I must have seemed strange to them, for I seldom heard the questions they put to me, and once was for mending the fire with the large copy of Dr. Johnson's dictionary, which happened to be in my hands, instead of a pine log, but was stopped in time by Patrick. They got quite riotous in the end, and I was fain to collect my thoughts.

Mr. Gordon dined from home that day. If his wife had accompanied him, I think I should have gone without my dinner rather than have faced Miss Tulloch merely in the boys' company. Mrs. Gordon must have thought me a singularly cold and sheepish lover. I sat at the opposite side of the table to Miss Tulloch, but I never looked her airt, and I answered all Mrs. Gordon's well-meant remarks with as much brevity as civility would permit.

The longest day will come to an end. Night arrived, and, comfortably in bed, I began seriously to ponder the question. And as I wished to attain

to a righteous decision, I argued for and against Mr. Gordon's proposition with strict impartiality.

There were strong inducements for me to embrace the proposal so unexpectedly made to me. Here was a comfortable down-sitting for life, falling like a ripe plum into my mouth without trouble, in a parish most quiet and pleasant, and where I was already familiar with and esteemed by the people. The smallness of the population made it an easy charge, which suited one who, however willing to spend and be spent in the Lord's service, had neither the strength nor the gifts fitted for a more prominent position in the kirk. The people all understood and spoke English, and Gaelic had ceased to be preached there for a generation. The stipend was a very fair one, being sixteen chalders; and if I married his niece, Mr. Gordon was likely to see to the manse being put into thorough order, and might even go a considerable length in furnishing it.

I never preached in any kirk I liked so well as Ballanclutha. It just suited my voice; and the congregation in their plaids, and with their sheep-dogs lying at their feet—for the dogs always

accompanied their masters to the kirk—were just a picture of simplicity and gravity of demeanour. And many of them, though poor enough in worldly goods, were rich in faith. It would be truly sweet to labour among so primitive and godly a flock. If from some scruples anent Miss Tulloch I rejected this opportunity of settling, I might never become a placed minister. Among my acquaintances in Edinburgh were several grey-haired preachers, who had never had a chance of a kirk from their youth up, and were melancholy disappointed men, living in humble lodgings, with scanty means and few friends. And truly a *grew* came over me when I thought I might end as they, and be shut out from all the kindly intercourse and pieties of domestic life. Why had I such an ill-will to the poor gentlewoman? For I found myself continually repeating, “Oh! if it had been anybody but Miss Tulloch, or if she had been something like that thoughtful gentle creature, Jeanie Carruthers!” And this led me to inquire what it was that made me so dour and backward to think of her as a wife.

It was not her want of beauty; a fair mind was of far greater value, I knew, than a sweet-featured

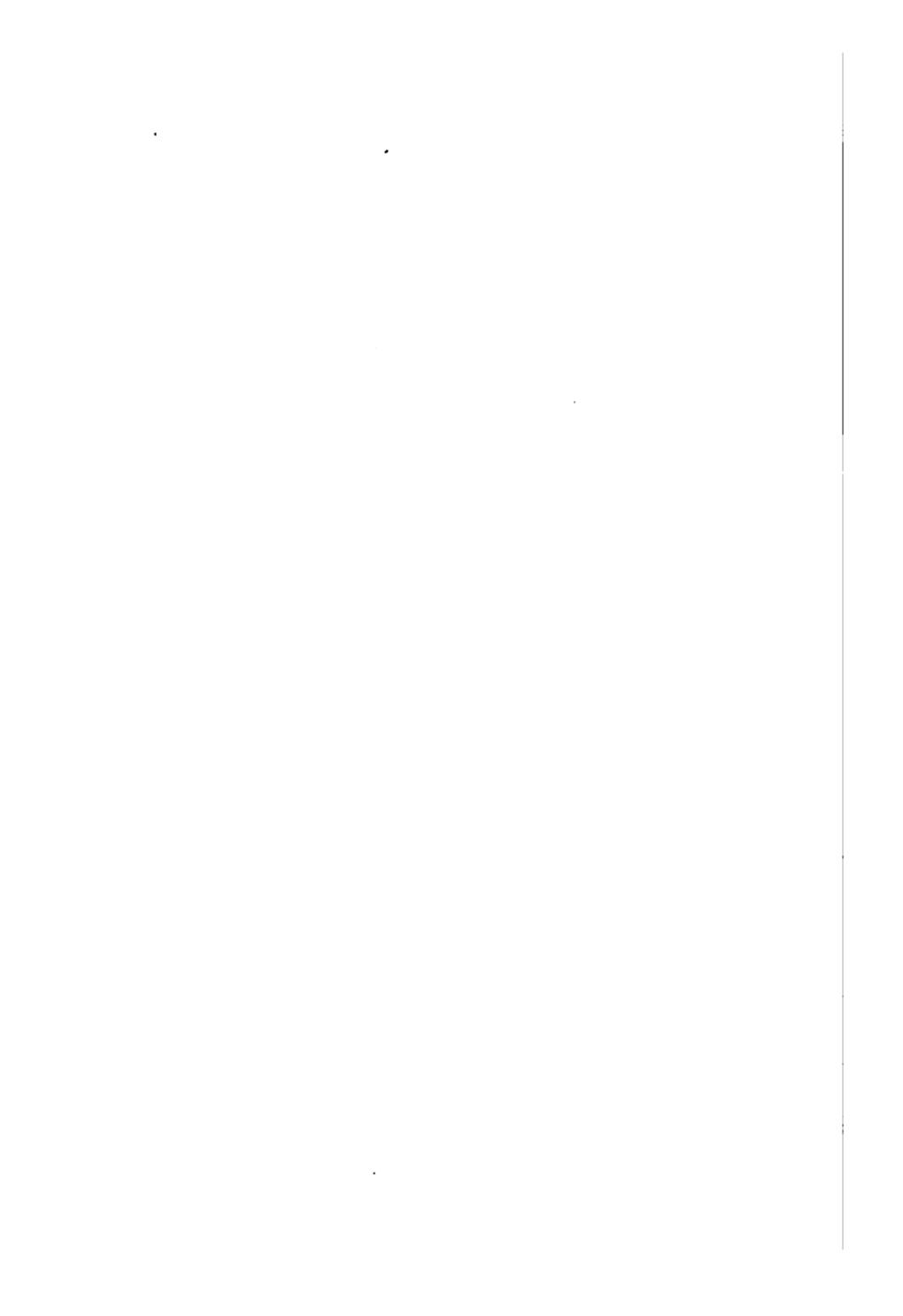
body, which is so soon doomed to decay, and I was sure I could stand any grewsomeness short of deformity in a wife, if satisfied concerning the heart and understanding. My affections might not be drawn out to her before wedlock, but I should have accepted Mr. Gordon's proffer with an honest intention of doing my duty by her, certain that esteem would soon ripen into conjugal love.. But the truth was, I had my misgivings—not of Miss Tulloch's piety, for it was clear she had none, but of her prudence and modesty. She lacked womanliness and discretion, of which Solomon makes such count in the female character. What kind of a minister's wife therefore would she be? Could I expect her to be my helpmate—to go hand-in-hand with me in any efforts for good amongst my people, or even to sympathise with my spiritual travails and anxieties for them? Would not rather the constant companionship of such a person be injurious to my own soul's health, drag me down, and be a snare to me as long as I lived? Paul, indeed, saith, "How knowest thou, O man! whether thou shalt save thy wife?" but would it not be presumption in me, for the mere sake of worldly lucre,

to marry a woman devoid of the fear of God, in the expectation that I might be made the instrument of her conversion? For doubtless the apostle only refers to marriages that were contracted when both parties were destitute of spiritual life.

Besides, Miss Tulloch had the germs of a fractious temper in her, or I was much mistaken, and might not prove a very loving daughter-in-law to my worthy mother; and the securing such a house as Ballanclutha manse for the latter was my strongest temptation to accept Mr. Gordon's terms. My mother, after all, might not be able to put up with my wife, who doubtless would not forget that she was the laird's niece; and Nelly, I was certain, would never sort with her as a mistress. Again, Miss Tulloch had come out of a bad nest, and vices are hereditary as well as diseases,—she might be a shame and a reproach to me all my days. And, to crown all, I was not altogether clear in my conscience that to obtain a kirk by such a marriage was not the very worst species of simony.

And so I lay, tossing from side to side and troubled in mind, till far on in the night; now in-

clining a little to this view, now to that, but never getting more reconciled to the thought of Miss Tulloch as a wife. At length, said I, "Let me test it by Scripture—'to the law and to the testimony'—and abide by what it pronounces;" and, being in great perplexity, I fervently implored God's guidance in this important crisis of my life. And soon that passage came to my mind where the believers of the early Christian Church were commanded to marry only "in the Lord." All hesitation was therefore over: as a Christian I could not conscientiously enter into the married state with Miss Tulloch; and, having arrived at this conclusion, I drew the blankets round me, my mind recovered its tranquillity, and in a few minutes I was sound asleep.



CHAPTER XX.

I LEAVE INVERUVEN.

LITTLE rest as I had had in the night, I was yet up an hour earlier than usual. My decision being made, it behoved me without delay to consider what influence it would have on my position in Mr. Gordon's family. Both the laird and his lady could not fail to be mortified and disappointed. He was a very proud man; just to his tenantry and servants, but distant and cold to his inferiors. He would probably regard me as a fool, who did not understand his own interests; but he would also be irritated that he had exposed any one connected with himself, however distasteful the relationship was to him, to rejection by a mere tutor in the family. I must look for instant dismissal; but now I had no wish to remain. I could not continue to live under the same roof with Miss Tulloch after what had passed, even

though she might be kept in ignorance of it. And so clearly did I see my way in this, that before I left my room I began to gather my books and small belongings, to be in readiness for packing.

When I was dressed, I sat down to write to Mr. Gordon—which, like most nervous people, I preferred to a personal interview. I did not enter fully, of course, into my reasons for declining the presentation—for which offer, made under a wrong impression, I thanked him respectfully—but said merely that I had not that affection for the young lady which he supposed, and which I should like to have for the person I made my wife. And alluding to his probable desire, which I acknowledged to be mine also, that the engagement for the next six months should be broken between us, I expressed my willingness to leave my situation immediately if he pleased: it only wanted ten days of the year. It was a delicate letter to write, and I weighed every word of it.

I meant to hand it to Mr. Gordon on rising from breakfast, but missed my opportunity; so on returning to the schoolroom, I sent Patrick

down with it to his papa. I went about the lessons with a heavy heart ; they were the last I should give the bairns, I expected. The poor things, of course, were unconscious of such a contingency, and could not understand why I looked so grave and shook my head when they proposed I should take them next day to see the Witches' Caldron, a wild, solitary waterfall among the hills, which the recent rains must have greatly increased in volume and sublimity. They thought me wanting in indulgence, while I was ready to weep over them.

In less than an hour Jamie Willison came to the schoolroom with a sealed packet from Mr. Gordon addressed to me. I took it with a tremulous hand, and when the man had left the room went apart into the window and opened it. It contained no writing—only my salary. I understood it.

“ Boys,” said I, going back to the table where they were sitting, after a pause, and making an effort to speak cheerfully, “ put up your books : we will go to the Witches’ Caldron to-day.”

Poor things ! they raised a great cry of pleasure ;

the books were on the shelves in a moment, and in a short time we were on our way to the hills. They little guessed how sore my heart was when joining in their gambols ; I wished the last day we were to be together to be one of happiness to them. The roaring linn was very grand, and I gave them my last lesson bending over the craig with the spray upon our faces. I wonder if Patrick and Henry ever remembered it in future days. They walked home quietly, and clinging to me as if they had a vague impression of something about to happen.

As I did not wish to appear at the dinner-table, I left the house considerably before that hour, and made a farewell call upon poor Mrs. Macbriar, who could only cry and lament over herself, and could not be made to understand that I was leaving. I also visited a few other friends in humbler station, dining deliciously on bannocks, cheese, and milk at a hospitable farmhouse.

The coach had not yet begun to run, but I expected to get on by means of the mail-gig which passed Inveruven gate, and stopped to pick up the house-bag, about seven in the morning. This

would enable me to catch the mail-coach for Edinburgh. I therefore went this evening, as in duty bound, to pay my parting respects to Mrs. Gordon, having first ascertained that she was alone.

I was in some doubts about the reception she would give me. I knocked at the drawing-room door, and was desired to enter. Mrs. Gordon was sitting at work, with little Missy on the sofa beside her, playing with her doll. She got rather red and drew herself up when she saw who it was, but she was too just to harbour unreasonable displeasure. So, when I thanked her for all her kindness during the time I had been in the family, and said something of my sorrow in parting from the children—and truly the tear came into my eye as I looked at little Missy, who was gazing innocently into my face as I spoke to her mother—she was quite softened; and, holding out her hand to me, she said, “Good-bye, then, Mr. Morrison, since it must be so.” And then she paused, and with a droll smile added, “And so we were mistaken, Mr. Morrison! But though I wish it had been otherwise, for our and the people’s

sakes, I must respect you for the decision." I knew well her opinion of Miss Tulloch. But to think of the suspicions that weary cleeking and pen-mending had occasioned!

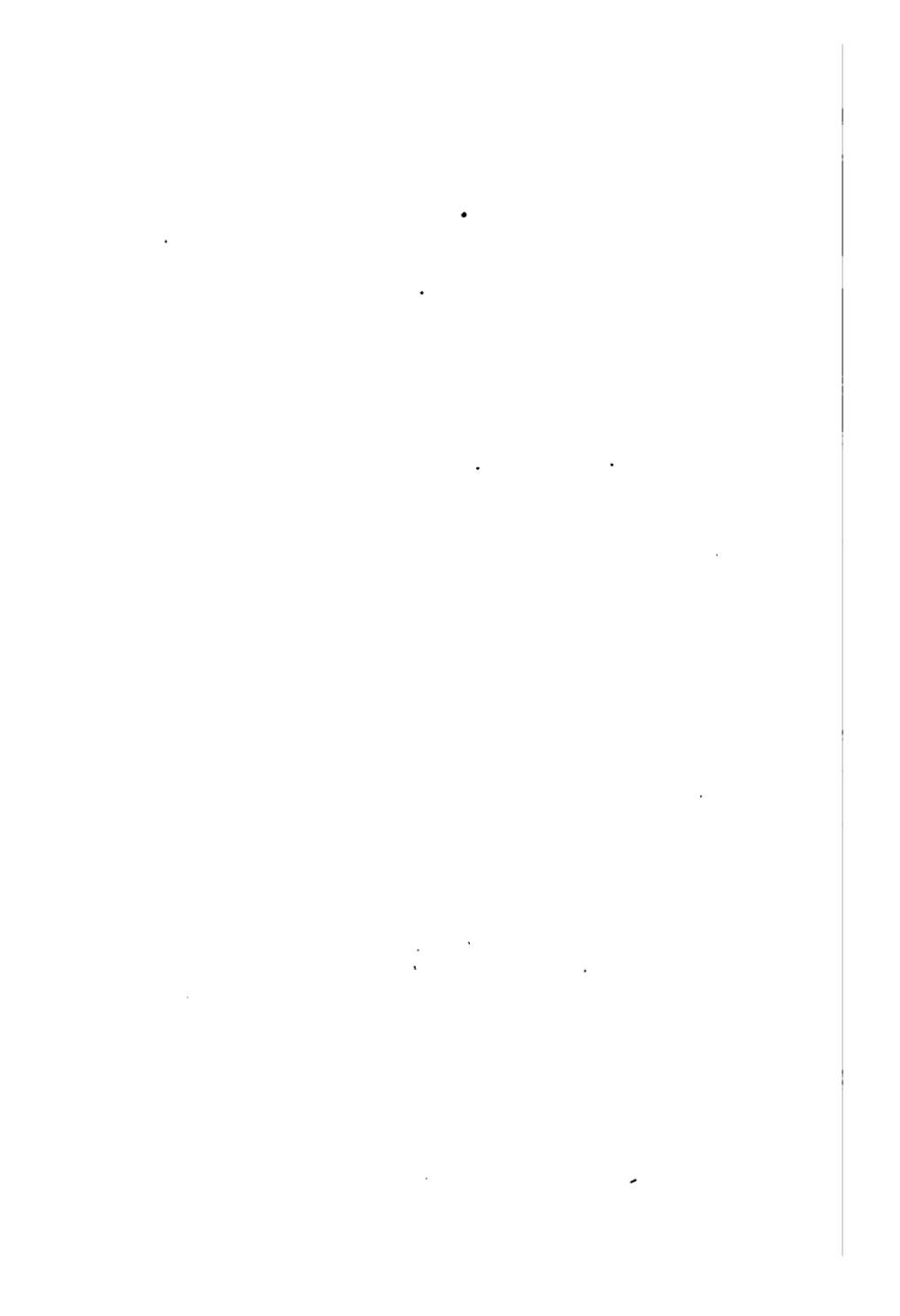
I begged her to present my parting respects to Mr. Gordon, and requested as a favour that the boys might not be informed of my approaching departure. She had the courtesy to accompany me to the door, and said she would give orders to have my luggage sent down that night to the lodge with the post-bag. And I left her, glad on my part to have got so well over the interview.

I cannot tell what Jamie Willison surmised from my sudden departure, but I doubt not he guessed part of the truth, if he did not know the whole, from keeping his ears open. Mrs. Anderson had a comfortable breakfast ready for me by six o'clock next morning, attending me herself; and Jamie, though I had only a trifle to carry, would accompany me to the lodge; nor did he leave me till he saw me and my portmanteau on the postman's gig. I bade the good-hearted fellow a kind farewell, and then, on a cold grey

morning, as we drove rapidly away, I took my last look of Inveruven.

It was about five months after this period that, on looking over the *Scotsman* newspaper, I lighted on the following matrimonial announcement:—"At Inveruven House, on the 17th inst., the Rev. Hector Gilfillan, minister of Ballanclutha, to Miss Tulloch."

I had heard that the factor, Mr. Gilfillan, had a nephew a probationer. I have no doubt this was he, and that he was the "deserving person" of whom Mr. Gordon spoke to me.



CHAPTER XXI.

“MAN IS BORN UNTO TROUBLE, AS THE SPARKS
FLY UPWARD.”

“**A**ND so you think I did right, mother?” I said to her, as we sat together by the fireside on the night of my return. My mother pressed my hand, which she held in hers, for answer.

“I do not want anybody except Mr. Kemp, who got me the situation, to know about the offer I had, mother,” I said. “Mr. and Mrs. Gordon would not like it, and people might think I was boasting.”

“I shall not be the one to spread it, Matthew my dear,” answered my mother. “Your coming back just now will surprise no one, for all our friends know how anxious I have been to get you home. What with my own money, and Archie’s, and Miss Betty’s, I have been laying by this last

year. I am getting an old woman now, Matthew, and you must not leave me again, my dear."

"No, mother, never again," said I, moved by this appeal.

"I would fain have bestowed some of it in the other end," said she, alluding to the money, and indicating the Carrutheresses' house by a motion of her head, "but I never dared to offer it. I wish I knew some way of helping them without hurting their feelings."

"Are they very ill off, mother?" I asked anxiously.

"I am afraid they are, Matthew," she answered, "but I can only guess it from the look of the house, for they never complain. All I can manage to do is to help to nurse Alison in her illnesses, that Jeanie may get some rest; they let me do that now."

I looked in upon them for a few minutes that night, and briefly mentioned that I had left my situation. Alison was better than when I saw her last, but Jeanie was like a shadow; Miss Tulloch's sonsy, strapping figure would have made three of hers.

And now I had reason to wonder at the leadings of Providence which had brought me home at this particular time to help and to comfort my mother, for a great and terrible calamity came suddenly upon us. I approach it with a trembling heart.

I have already mentioned that when that fearful war was over, Archie's ship had been ordered off immediately to a West Indian station. It was a great trial to us; but we had to submit, trusting that ere long she would be permitted to return home. But though she did return at no very distant date, Archie came not with her; he was then lying in his grave, poor fellow, on the far-away Indian shore. It had pleased God to save him from the perils of the deep waters and the merciless fury of war; but he had not long reached the beautiful island, of which he wrote us so glowing a description, before he was seized with the dreadful yellow fever, and died (alas, alas!) without a kindred hand to close his eyes.

It was a sad, sad heart-break to us, although the letter which brought the news, and which was written by Captain Kennedy himself with much feeling, told us that we were heirs to nearly three

thousand pounds of prize-money due to my brother. God knows we would have cheerfully seen the gear at the bottom of the deep sea for the chance of once more looking on Archie's blithe and kindly face! But that we were never again to do in this world.

Oh, Archie, my brother, my brother! how gladly would I have purchased your life at the expense of my own, for I have always been a weak and timorous creature, ill fitted for the wear and tear of this world, while you had the bold heart and the strong arm to help yourself and others. But God's ways are not as man's ways, and the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. In the freshness of my grief it seemed to me but yesterday that we had gripped each other's hands on Leith pier, and I had returned sadly to our altered home, while he went forth in his young, vigorous manhood, to conquer the world. Yesterday! it was but then that we were playfellows in the orchard at the manse—he, Mary, and I; they handsome, and full of life and hope, I clinging to and depending on them as the weak on the strong. And to think that both these young bright lives were

quenched, and I was to the fore! But it was our part to be “still, and know that He was God.”

We could learn few particulars of Archie’s death; and we had not the satisfaction of knowing the state of his mind in his last moments. But I will hope that the blessed Saviour, whom he had been taught to love and trust in his early years, went hand in hand with him through the dark waters of the river of death, and that he was enabled to take a sure hold of the promises. His Bible was sent to us with his other things, and we were told that it was discovered under his pillow after his death. I found that Bible, and many touching mementoes of my father and Mary, in my mother’s private repositories after her own death.

But the bitterest grief must grow calm at last, and though we truly mourned many days for Archie, and I was conscious of a change in my mother from that time, we could not but eventually feel how the trial was mingled with mercy. The three thousand pounds which we inherited enabled my mother to end her days in quiet and comfort; and when the period of her death arrived, doubtless

it was a consolation to her that I, without a kirk or many friends, should have such a provision.

We were now above the necessity of letting lodgings, and we parted with Miss Betty Kil-winning. We had an income—thanks to Mr. Kemp, who invested our money for us—of a hundred and eighty pounds a year, including what my mother enjoyed from the Widows' Fund. We had always been accustomed to frugality, and we found this sum amply sufficient for all our wants. Having no lodgers, we had no need for so large a house, but we had not the heart to go house-hunting the first term after Archie's death; and during the early period of our affliction, it was a comfort to me to have the Carrutherses still as our next-door neighbours.

When my grief had become less self-engrossing, I began to observe that the cloud, which her earnest sympathy in our distress had somewhat scattered, had again descended upon Jeanie. She was still indefatigable in working, still bore patiently with Alison's fretfulness and perversity; but it was painfully apparent to me that the sorely-tried strength and endurance were being slowly but

surely exhausted. I began to tremble for her life; and if Jeanie fell a victim to a premature decay, what would become of the old mother and Alison?

They were plainly very ill off. Their parlour was getting more and more faded and poor like. As articles wore out I observed they were not renewed. It often brought tears into my eyes to notice how anxiously they patched and darned and strove to hide deficiencies. Poor things, poor things! What was to become of them?—too proud for charity, and yet so needing Christian help! Every necessary of life was so dear, too, for we had had two bad harvests in succession to raise the markets. How they contrived to live I know not, for the doctor's bills for medicines and attendance must have nearly exhausted their earnings. Probably the daughters fed the mother and starved themselves. I never sat down to dinner at that time without wishing to transfer our bit of meat to the table next door. And in these troubles the autumn and winter passed, and the spring-time came.

My mother and I agreed to take a tea-dinner

one day, that I might have time to walk some miles into the country and back without hurrying myself. I purposed to call at the cottage of an old woman on this side Pennicuik, from whom I had often purchased flowers for the Carrutheresses. I knew that at this season her little garden would be blooming with snowdrops and crocuses. And so I found it; and for a trifle I obtained a goodly bab, with which I came my ways home, pleasing myself by anticipating the surprise and delight of the poor girls.

My mind had been much exercised of late with plans anent them, and a new idea occurred to me on my homeward walk. We had not yet given up our house: what if we still retained it? Miss Betty's rooms were unoccupied. We might sell the furniture, as we should have to do if we took a smaller house, and we might propose to the Carrutheresses, as for our mutual advantage, that they should take these unfurnished rooms from us, which would be a saving of at least ten pounds a year—a great sum for them. One forenoon would suffice for carrying their furniture in; and it was easy to wheel the old woman from one

house to the other. I hoped that my mother, being long accustomed to strangers in the house, would make no serious objection; and Nelly was easy to manage. The longer I considered it, the more did I approve of the plan; I felt, indeed, a little proud of my ingenuity in devising it; and I resolved that very evening—there was no time to lose, for it was the house-letting season—to break it to my mother. Being eager to set about it; and moreover, beginning to feel keenly appetized, I got over the ground in a very light and heartsome way, and was sooner back than I had anticipated.

Before going home the flowers had to be handed in to the Carrutherses. I was about to pull their bell when I observed that the door was slightly ajar. I had passed the milk-girl near the entrance to the stair, gossiping with a neighbour; and I supposed that Alison, seeing her cross the street, and being in a hurry for her milk, had opened the door to be in readiness for it. I did not need to be on ceremony, so I just walked straight forward into the parlour, the door of which was also open, extending the flowers at arm's length before me, in happy expectation of a burst of pleasure follow-

ing the sight of them. But at the first step I made into the room I stopped short in great astonishment.

The Carrutheresses had seldom visitors except on business, and till now I had supposed myself their only male one. But here was a young, fresh-coloured man sitting beside poor Mrs. Carruthers, and holding her passive hand in his, while he talked eagerly and familiarly to the two girls; but more particularly to Alison, who stood near him—for Jeanie was seated at the table, her work as if hastily pushed aside, her head bent down, and her face hidden in her hands. Alison, too, seemed much agitated, and her eyes were fixed upon the stranger as if she was devouring his words. I stood still, as I have said, in amazement, and some moments elapsed before my entrance was noticed. It was the stranger that first observed me, and as he stopped suddenly in his talk and looked toward the door, Alison turned her face in the same direction and saw me.

“Oh, it’s just Mr. Matthew!” she exclaimed: “come in, Mr. Matthew.” And as I mechanically obeyed her invitation, Jeanie rose quickly from her

seat and went past me out of the room ; yet not so hastily but that I saw her face was flushed, and that there were traces of tears on her cheeks. What could it mean ?

The young man rose as I came forward, and made me a civil bow. He was frank and manly like, with a certain rustic air about his dress and manners, as if fresh from the country, or it might be from abroad, for he was so ruddy and weather-beaten looking. He seemed excited, as well as Alison, and was perhaps a little embarrassed by my unexpected appearance.

“It’s Jamie Bethune—an old acquaintance of ours just arrived from abroad, Mr. Matthew,” said Alison, seeing my wondering look. “He has been here an hour or two, but we have scarcely got the better of the surprise yet, especially Jeanie. Come and sit down, Mr. Matthew.”

But I saw I had interrupted some important conversation, and was troubled that I had been the cause of sending Jeanie away ; so, though rather disappointed, I laid the flowers upon the table with as good a grace as I could, and saying something about my mother expecting me at present, I with-

drew quietly from the room. But Alison followed and stopped me.

“Come in here, Mr. Matthew,” she said, in an earnest voice, as she pushed open the door of the little fireless kitchen. I did as she bade me, and then she hastily closed it.

“You are such a kind friend of ours, Mr. Matthew,” she then said, “that we ought to have no secrets from you ; and you shall know it before any other body—I am sure Jeanie will wish that.”

I stood speechless, gazing at her.

“Oh, Mr. Matthew,” continued Alison, suddenly bursting into tears and laying her hand on my arm, which, but for her own agitation, she might have felt tremble—“oh, Mr. Matthew, what do you think has happened ? Jamie Bethune has come all the way from America, and just on our account.”

“Is he a relation, Alison ?” I asked.

“Oh, we have no relations,” she said, sadly ; “at least, none that I know of, except old Aunty Peggy in Dingwall, and neither Jeanie nor I have ever seen her. No, no, Mr. Matthew ; he’s just an old neighbour’s son, and a schoolfellow of Jeanie’s.”

“A schoolfellow ?” I said.

“ Yes ; and he and Jeanie were great friends from the time she was this height,” putting our her hand. “ All the years his mother lived, he was almost as often in our house as in his own. Jeanie could always get Jamie Bethune to do anything she liked.”

Alison paused, as if her thoughts were dwelling on the past, and I could hear the beatings of my heart in the silence.

“ Well, Mr. Matthew,” she resumed, “ when old Mrs. Bethune died, business was very slack, and Jamie and his brother were not getting on well in their trade, so five years ago they made up their minds to go to America, and he wanted Jeanie to go with him—Jamie did—but she would not hear of it.”

“ Would not hear of it ? ” I repeated breathlessly.

“ Would not hear of it,” continued Alison, her face suddenly flushing with some exciting recollection—“ would not hear of it, Mr. Matthew, because she could not think of leaving our poor mother and me in our poverty and weakness. God forgive me for having so often vexed and

troubled her that gave up so much as I know she did for me!—but I always hated myself for it, even when I did it.” And Alison wept bitterly as she thus alluded to her besetting fault.

“Well, Mr. Matthew,” she went on, when she had somewhat composed herself, “Jamie and his brother have had to work hard. It was very discouraging at first, but now they have got their land cleared, and everything comfortable about them, and Jamie, who’s been always hearing of us from a friend of his in Edinburgh, has left his brother to look after things for a short while, and has made a run over here—what do you think for, Mr. Matthew?”

“What, Alison?” I asked; but I thought the question would never come from my quivering lips.

“Oh, Mr. Matthew, he still wants to marry Jeanie. But that’s not all: he knows that she would not leave us now, more than before; so he says we must all go, poor mother and me too, for that I will get plenty to do at Janeville—he has called his farm after Jeanie, Mr. Matthew—and be able to keep myself, living’s so cheap there.

Only think, Mr. Matthew: eggs at threepence the dozen, and flour at sixpence the peck! However, they have no baker there yet; but Jamie says we will soon learn to make bread and pies for ourselves. And he's so kind about mother, and says she will be made quite comfortable on the passage. Oh, Mr. Matthew, Mr. Matthew,” said Alison, fairly breaking down again as she dropped into a chair, and in her agitation began rocking her poor weak limbs backwards and forwards, “I never thought to be so happy again, and I'm sure I don't deserve it, for I've always been murmuring and fretful; God forgive me!”

I could not then speak, but I took her hand in mine, and pressed it to signify my sympathy. She retained mine in both of hers, and said, affectionately, “Leaving you will be the only trying thing, Mr. Matthew; for what can we do but go? we are so poor here—poorer than you can think, Mr. Matthew! I don't mind telling you that now, though I could not do it before. You have been like a brother to us since ever we knew you. Jeanie and I have often said that to each other. God bless you! God bless you, Mr. Matthew!”

“Hush, Alison!—oh, hush!” I murmured, faintly; every affectionate word she spoke was an agony to me. There was a ringing sound outside on the landing-place, as if a can had been set down; it was the milk at last. The interruption came just in time, for I could have endured this conversation no longer. Alison evidently ascribed my emotion to sympathy, and my attempt to check her to unwillingness to listen to my own commendation.

“Good-bye, then, Mr. Matthew,” she said, gratefully, as she rose hurriedly and went to the water-pipe to bathe her swollen eyelids before meeting the milk-girl, “good-bye, and be sure you come in again to see Jamie Bethune; I will tell Jeanie that you know all about it.”

“Tell her, Alison,” I said, with my back to her and my hand on the sneck of the door,—“tell her that she has my best wishes for her happiness.”

“I will, Mr. Matthew—I will,” said Alison, kindly; “and thank you very much for the flowers.”

Flowers!—where now were the feelings and hopes with which I had gathered them?

CHAPTER XXII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

IT is a strange thing, and utterly unaccountable to a mind like mine—for I am no philosopher—that though so many years have elapsed since the evening on which that painful revelation was made to me, I am at this day perfectly familiar with the aspect of that apartment, which I then entered for the first and only time. I seem still to see the cold, dull little kitchen, with its empty yawning grate and soot-sprinkled hearth ; the scanty tin utensils above the small dresser ; the damp stains on the wall beside the sink ; and even the broom, worn down by long use to a mere stump, standing in the corner behind the door. I see them all ; and yet how could I have noted these things at that time ? I cannot tell. But the unoccupied, dreary look of the place in which Alison told that tale which affected all my

future life, is as fresh at this moment in my recollection as if I had seen it but yesterday.

Nelly had also heard the sound of the milk-can, and had opened our door for our supply. I went softly through the lobby, that my mother might not hear me, and shut to the door of my room upon me. What a relief the mere sensation of being alone was! I no longer required to act a part. I hurried through my chamber for some minutes, as if in bodily exercise to find a vent for what oppressed me, and then sank wearily into a chair and rested my head upon the bed. I felt stunned and stupefied, like one who has received a severe blow, and panted and struggled for breath, while a heavy hand, as it were, was pressed against my chest. I had got a blow—a blow.

Oh, my blindness, my blindness! I had never known what Jeanie Carruthers was to me till another had put forth a claim to her. My eyes were now opened, and I saw that since I first knew her character she had unconsciously influenced my every action, and had formed the standard by which I had judged all women. I

had been ignorantly fostering an enemy in my bosom,—no, not an enemy, for to love a virtuous woman even hopelessly is an ennobling thing. Still, if I had known something of these passages in Jeanie Carruthers's life, this sudden agony would have been spared me. The name of James Bethune had never been mentioned in my presence: would that they had been franker with me! But that feeling I soon saw was unjust; I had no claim to so delicate a confidence. She had wholly belonged to me for years, I had imagined; and now here was this man, who had been silent for so long, interposing himself between us. God forgive me! I felt my heart becoming full of bitterness and hateful thoughts—their presence terrified me. “Get thee behind me, Satan!” I earnestly exclaimed. And indeed I loved Jeanie too well to be able to hate anything connected with her.

But I felt I had reached an epoch in my personal history: life would have a different aspect to me for the future. Calmly and contentedly my days might yet glide on—and would, I doubted not, even at that moment—but their

freshness and sunshine were gone, never to return. The future had no object, for I could not hope to find another Jeanie—I had no wish to do so. My affection for her had been no sudden impulse, but had grown with my knowledge of her character, of her gentle daily self-denials, her unassuming piety and fortitude, and the clear true views she had of life and its obligations. There was no romance in my love for Jeanie Carruthers, but what a blank existence seemed to me without her!

In this fashion I sadly pondered. A burst of weeping had relieved my heart; the first sharp pain was over, and I was sorrowful, but resigned. With my face still hidden upon the bed, I sat meditating and resolving, when a hand, whose soothing touch I had often felt, was gently laid upon my shoulder. With a start I looked up, and saw my mother wistfully regarding me.

“What is it, my bairn?” she asked, in a troubled voice.

I had never concealed any feeling from my mother before, but I hesitated now.

“Am I late, mother?” I said, evasively; but I

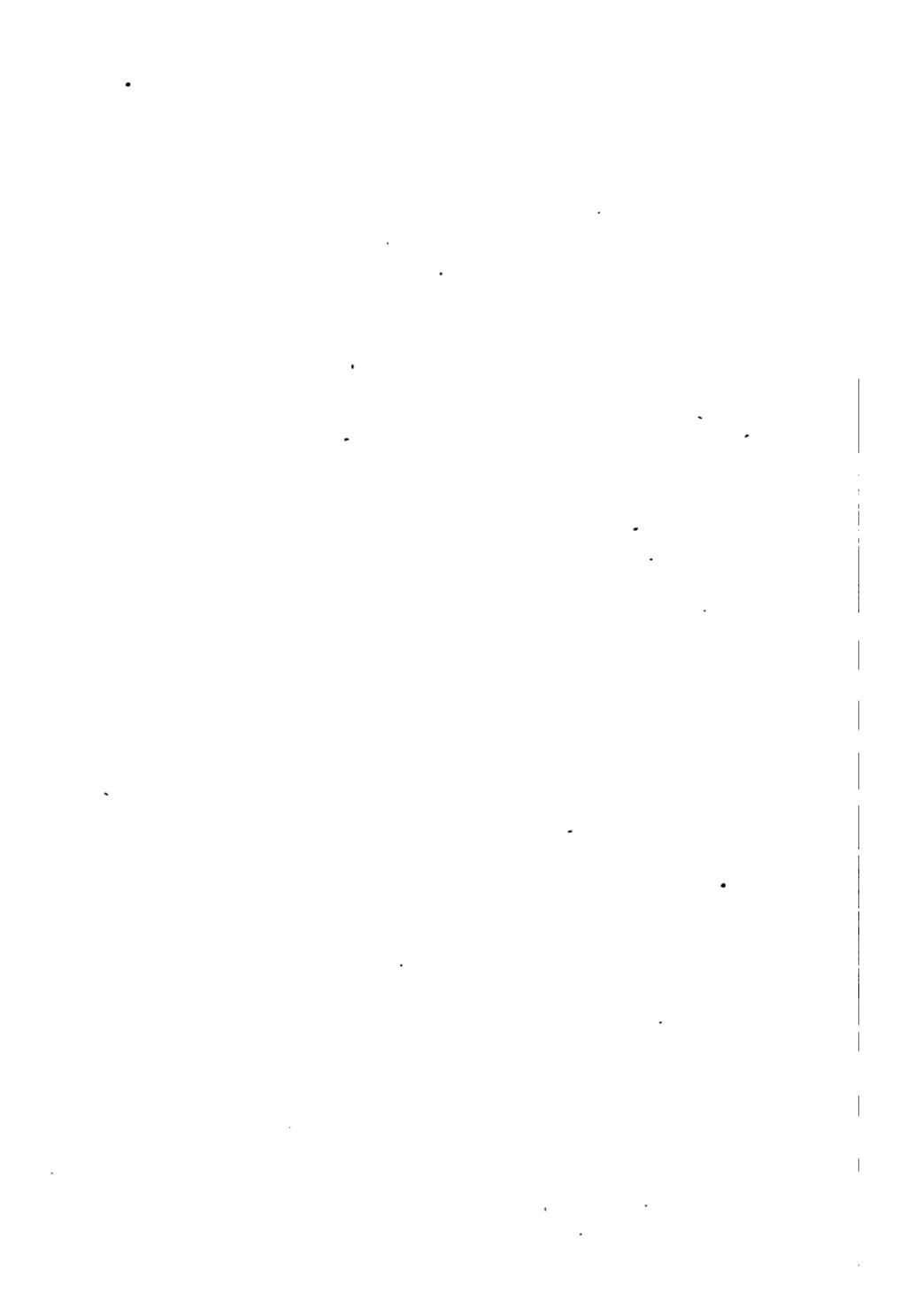
felt the blood mount up to my forehead beneath her searching eye.

“Nelly says you have been an hour in your room, my dear: I knocked on your door, but I suppose you did not hear it. The tea is ready, Matthew.” But still her eyes continued anxiously to examine my face, as if to read there what had vexed me. I could not resist their silent, loving pleading.

“Mother,” I said, as composedly as I could, “Jeanie Carruthers is going to be married to an old sweetheart who has just arrived from America.”

I felt my mother start.

“Jeanie Carruthers!” she exclaimed. Then, her voice suddenly sinking, “My poor laddie!” she added.



CHAPTER XXIII.

RESIGNATION.

JAMES BETHUNE was pressed for time, so it was arranged that they were to sail in a month, and from Leith, on account of Mrs. Carruthers, whose helplessness made a long land journey unadvisable. Their passages were secured, and they were in all the bustle of hasty preparation. Mrs. Carruthers's little annuity was compromised for a sum of money paid down. The furniture was to be sold; for the expense of taking it to America, and afterwards transporting it to James's backwoods settlement would cost more, he asserted, than to get new plenishing there. But I anticipated little likelihood of a separate dwelling being thought of for Alison and her mother when once they reached their destination, though the former talked of it now. What would two additional mouths to feed matter, in the rough

plenty of an American farmer's household ! and how easy, where wood was so abundant, to add to the original log house, at any time, whatever rooms circumstances might render necessary ! Besides, the brothers had followed the trade of upholsterers in this country, and had themselves made the furniture for the dwelling-house from the trees they had felled on their own land.

He was really a generous, warm-hearted young man, James Bethune. His consideration for the poor mother and Alison procured him my sincere respect. As to Jeanie, he seemed strongly but reasonably attached to her. She had evidently great influence over him ; and this augured well for their future prosperity, as her actions were regulated by strong religious principle and sound common-sense. It was a comfort to me to feel assured that her happiness would be secure with him. Yet they were decided contrasts to each other ; for he was of a gay, light-hearted disposition, while she was quiet and thoughtful. At present he was in all the high spirits of one who enjoys a rare holiday ; they were infectious, and the old dull parlour now resounded with accents

of mirth to which in past days it was wholly unaccustomed.

There was a change for the better already in Jeanie. There was now a light in her eye and a faint dawn of colour on her cheek, though as yet it was not stationary, but came and went as with her breath. And, raw as was still the wound in my heart, I could not but rejoice at these tokens, notwithstanding the source from which they sprang. Jeanie seemed anxious that I should like her betrothed, and with a timid, blushing earnestness took an early opportunity of saying to me that she hoped we should be good friends. I was indeed disposed to think well of him, for her sake; but ere half the month was over I liked him for his own. There was no resisting the influence of his honest, kindly nature, and his advances to me were so friendly and cordial, mingled with respect for my profession, that I soon learned to forgive him for winning Jeanie; nor do I believe that he ever guessed what she had been to me.

How well her unwonted happiness and the bashful consciousness of a bride became Jeanie!

Her feelings were never obtrusive, but every look and word showed a heart now at ease. It was a new thing to see her working for herself, for she was busy preparing her simple outfit. The once quiet room was now a daily scene of bustle and activity. James Bethune kept them all alive by the influence of his own energy. He was in and out twenty times a day, and had always something new to tell on each occasion. The poor mother would often look stunned and bewildered by the unusual movement around her; but even she was brightened by it. It was as if this young man's coming had brought air and sunshine into a chamber closed to them before.

I could not keep away from the girls, painful as it was to me to witness the preparations for their departure; besides, to have done so would have surprised and troubled them, and perhaps excited their suspicions: I wished Jeanie's happiness to be unalloyed. Of course, such friends as we had been could not part, probably never to meet again on earth, without sorrow; and I hoped that the sadness I could not always conceal would be attributed to this.

I ran the risk, however, of liking her better and better. I had never seen Jeanie under the influence of happiness till now; I never knew till now how sweet her smile was, or how naturally cheerful was her mind. Only blinks of a sunny temper had shone out formerly, like sunbeams from a calm but wintry sky, transient, and lacking force and fervour. Now she minded me of a sweet cloudless summer morning, when the dewy freshness of the dawn is not yet exhaled, and all indicates a bright day in prospect.

There was nothing extreme about Jeanie—nothing striking or brilliant; her present happiness was serene and sober, and therefore promised to be durable. She possessed that most lovable thing in woman, "a meek and quiet spirit," which truly is the chiefest of the fireside virtues, seeing that the want of it neutralizes all the others; for a woman may be pious, chaste, and upright, her husband may have full confidence in her prudence and frugality, and yet a captious and fretful temper may make her, with all these good qualities, less a helpmate to him than a cross. A beautiful countenance soon becomes familiar to a

husband's eye, but a sweet and gracious temper grows more lovely every year. The longer I live the more am I convinced that the most desirable quality in either husband or wife is a calm, unselfish, and forbearing spirit.

Poor Alison had it not—but she had been sorely tried with bodily ailments in addition to poverty. For the present, however, she was a different creature, forgetful of self, and wholly occupied with others. It seemed as if her eyes had been suddenly opened to her sister's worth, and that she was endeavouring to repay some of her obligations to her. She was even stronger in health—so much influence has the mind over the body; and she was unwearied in furthering their little preparations. She liked to talk to me of the good times in prospect, and many an anecdote of their early acquaintance with James Bethune did I now hear from her for the first time. What a change a few weeks had wrought!

Jeanie, I could observe, did not forget her mother's and Alison's wants when providing her own bridal wardrobe; and she even found time to make a little keepsake for me. It was a band-

case of black silk, containing two pairs of beautifully worked cambric bands for the time when I should be a placed minister. Ah, dear! that time has never come, and Jeanie Carruthers's bands have never been seen in a pulpit. Years have yellowed them, but otherwise they are just as her hands finished them. I sometimes take them out of the case and look at them—I have done so to-night—but years had elapsed after her departure from Scotland before I had resolution to do so. Even yet I am strangely moved by the sight of them ; but it is a gentle emotion, for I know that Jeanie Carruthers has been happy in her new life.

My mother, just and worthy woman though she was, and highly appreciating Jeanie, could not altogether forgive her for preferring another to me. And yet, I verily believe, if I had married Jeanie Carruthers she would have thought I might have done better, and that a simple mantua-maker was not a fit mate for a minister's son.

“ Matthew,” she abruptly said to me, one of these days, “ as the Carrutherses are leaving the country, I see no need to keep that story of the

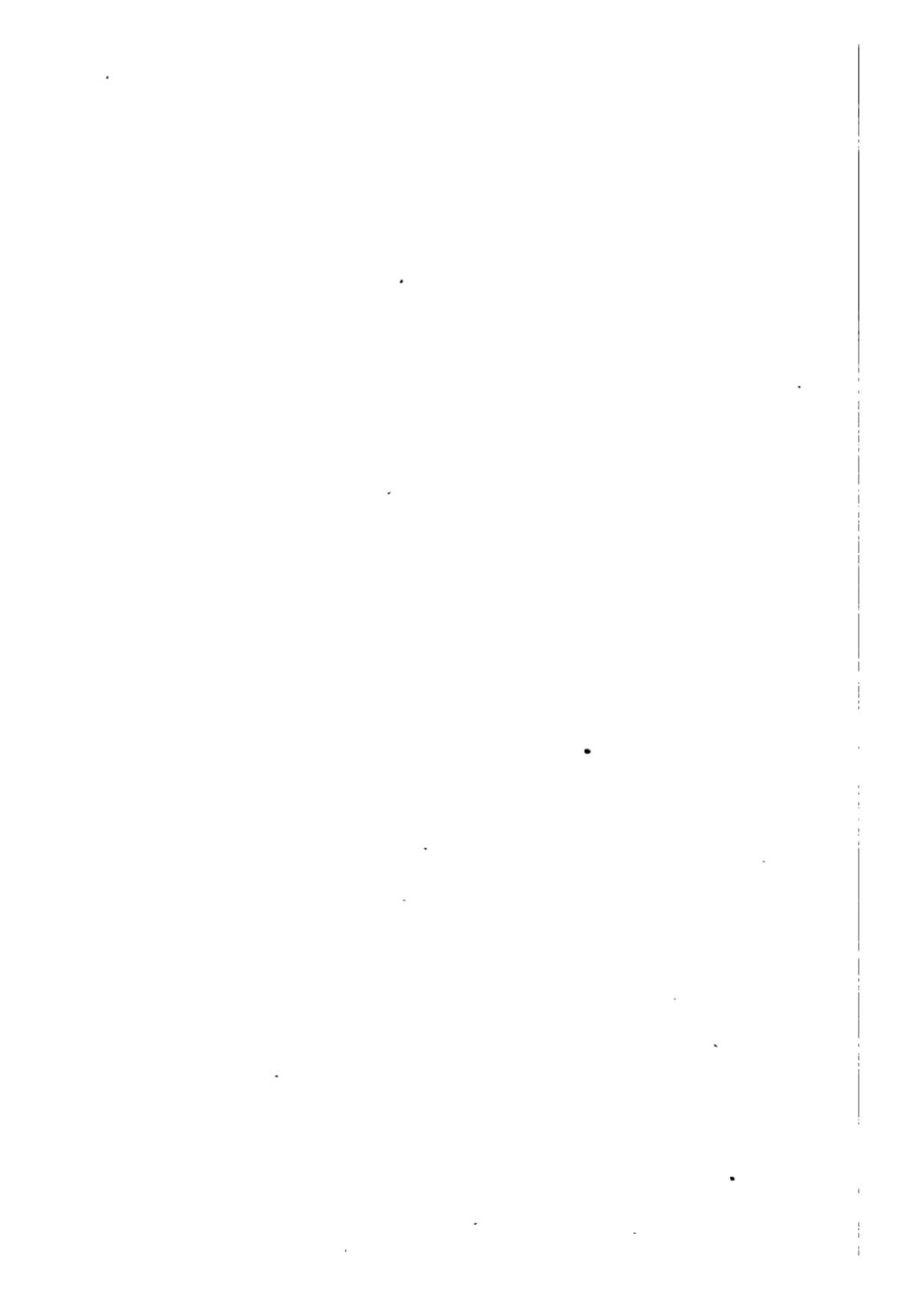
young lady and the kirk from their knowledge any longer ; and so I warn you that I mean to tell them about it."

I let her have her own way, as it was evident it would be a gratification to her to make them aware that I might have been both a placed minister and a married man ere this if I had liked. And maybe, though their friendship for me was very sincere, this intelligence raised me somewhat in their estimation, for we are all apt to value people according to their success in the world.

I could never get my mother to do justice to James Bethune's good qualities. I never knew her prejudiced against any human being before, and she nearly quarrelled with Miss Kemp for expressing a high opinion of him. But I understood the secret feeling that had warped her judgment, and knew that time would set all right. Both she and Miss Kemp gave the bride a handsome present.

The marriage was to take place a week before they sailed ; the married pair were to visit some relations of the bridegroom's in the country during

the interval; Alison and her mother were to come to us, and the furniture was to be roused. So it was arranged by me, whom all consulted as the family friend.



CHAPTER XXIV.

FAREWELL.

THEY were married quietly one forenoon. Alison was bridesmaid, and I acted as best man. My mother, Miss Kemp, and a male friend of the bridegroom's, were all the company. Jeanie, in her dark silk dress and white shawl,—the latter being my bridal gift to her,—looked ladylike and pretty. They were a comely pair—she so gentle and modest, and he such a handsome, hearty young man. I witnessed the ceremony with more composure than I anticipated, and I was able to wish them joy with singleness of heart at its close. They started immediately on their journey, and we got poor Mrs. Carruthers moved quietly here to my mother's house in the afternoon, being the first time she had been out of her own dwelling for years. Then, with the help of Nelly, Alison

and I arranged everything for the sale next day; after which the door was locked for the night. Alison, poor thing! was much exhausted by the trying scenes of the day, and my mother herself put her to bed and tended her as if she had been her own daughter.

The old furniture, which had seemed decent and respectable when properly arranged, made but a shabby appearance at the sale. There was a tolerably sharp competition among the Cowgate wives for it, however, and by the afternoon it was all cleared off, and the house was empty; I was the last person to leave it, having seen the auctioneer away.

The parlour in which I had spent so many happy hours looked very desolate stripped of its furniture, and with the dirt and disorder of the recent sale on its walls and floor. I groaned in spirit as I gazed around me. Who could have foretold this change a few weeks back? There was the spot where Jeanie used to sit at work; here stood my own chair. These days would never return; that pleasant social intercourse was gone for ever. I was such a creature

of habit that, though I had felt nothing warmer than friendship for Jeanie, I should still have suffered by this breaking up of my daily life. As it was, I cannot describe the bitterness.

I wandered up and down the parlour, indulging in melancholy thoughts. My footsteps echoed dismally through the empty house. One heavy affliction had followed another, and, like the wise king of Israel, I was ready to say of life and its changes, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." A deep depression began to settle down upon me, and at last I was fain to leave the house and go out to breathe the fresh air of the Meadows before presenting myself at home.

There was little to do during the few days that intervened between the roup and the return of the newly-married pair. It would have been better for me if more had been left to the last, for my spirits flagged extremely as the time for sailing drew near. Jeanie and her husband returned two days before it; they went into lodgings, but most of their time was spent with us. We were all sorrowful, but quiet, and by

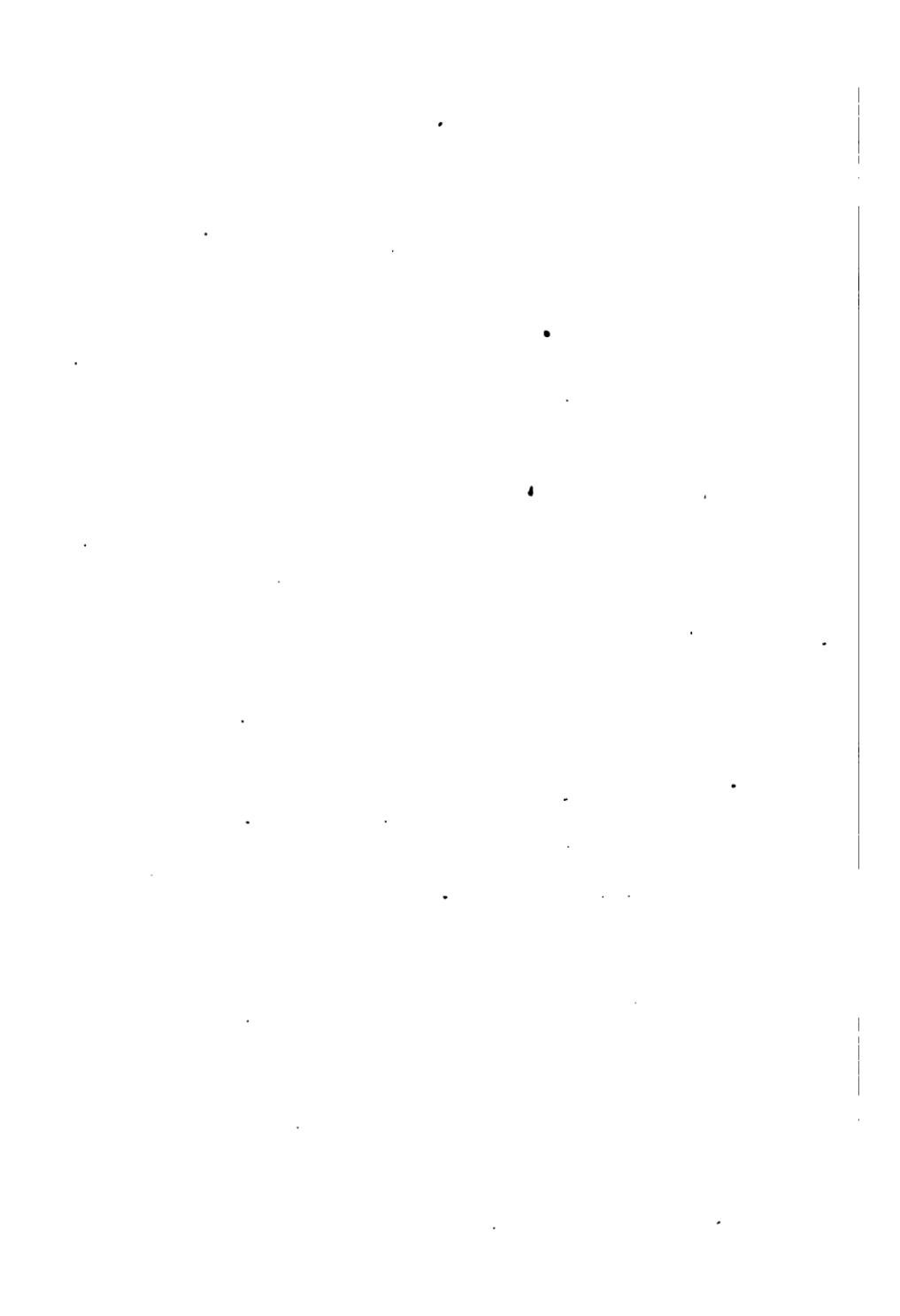
common consent avoided talking of our approaching separation. I went down to the vessel with James Bethune the day before it, and we got the luggage on board.

At last the hour arrived; wind and tide were favourable for sailing. The helpless mother, less nervous than we feared, had been got safely on board, her son-in-law taking charge of her. We were gathered round her chair—the one relic of their old home that accompanied them. My mother and Miss Kemp were both there. All the females were weeping; but strangers were moving around us, and little was said. We were soon warned to leave. I bade farewell to the aged woman. “Farewell, Mr. Matthew, and God bless you!” sobbed Jeanie and Alison, as I embraced them for the first and last time. Then I grasped James Bethune’s hand, and in another minute was standing beside my mother and Miss Kemp on the pier.

Leith Pier was a fatal spot to me. It was there I said farewell to Archie, and now from it I looked my last on the Carrutheresses, as leaving their mother in the care of James Bethune, they

ascended to the deck to wave another weeping adieu to us while the ship loosed from the pier and glided out into the Firth. I seem to see them still, as I saw them then, leaning over the side, now letting their white handkerchiefs stream out on the breeze, and now bending their weeping faces into them. We stood gazing on them till their features and even their figures were lost in the distance, and all we could discern were two shadowy specks clinging closely to each other and looking steadfastly towards the shore; and so I have seen them often in my dreams.

Faint cheers from the receding vessel swept over the waters, and were responded to from the shore, but my heart lay like lead in my bosom.



CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

SUCH are some of the vicissitudes of an uneventful and retired life; all over, however, long ago. It has been a singular pleasure, though certainly not unmixed with pain, to retrace this my simple history. I might have entered into fuller details, but I have thought it prudent to err rather as to brevity. There are some experiences in the lives of men too sacred to be laid bare to any eye save the All-seeing one, and these I have left untold.

I am alone now; indeed, it is many years since my mother was taken home. We were never separate after I left Inveruven, except for the few weeks every summer which I spent with Adam Bowman. I never again had the offer of a kirk, though I stood candidate for more than one; but I found I could be useful

in the Lord's vineyard without being an ordained labourer, and He opened ways for me. We had sufficient worldly means, and I was content.

My mother faded gradually. Her setting was calm and tranquil as her long life had been; she was even lifted above trouble on my account. "Farewell, Matthew; we shall meet again," were the last words she addressed to me.

Amen! mother, in that land where there shall be "no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, for the former things shall have passed away." Thank God for death! "I would not live always." But oh, thank God for life—for Him who is the "resurrection and the life," who died that we might live!

I was very lonely for a long time after my mother's death; I missed her cheerful, loving companionship. For though latterly so feeble as to be able only to move between her bed and the easy-chair in the parlour with my assistance and Nelly's, she was ever youthful in spirit, thankful for every mercy, and full of sympathy for others. The Kemps were truly kind to me

when she was gone, but no one could fill her place.

And ere long Mr. Kemp went to his rest also, like a full sheaf of corn, rich in faith and good works; and his worthy little sister, now far up in years, was alone too. We were like aunt and nephew, and when she died I was chief mourner at her funeral, and laid her head in the grave at her request, though not her heir. Many must still remember the little, kindly, eccentric old lady, whose benefactions, far and near, could not be fully hidden: every tale of distress and poverty met a ready response from her. I often visit the brother's and sister's graves in the Calton burying-ground, where my mother also lies. There "they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." Mr. Meggat died in Liverpool years ago, an old man and full of days.

Cousin Braidfute, poor man, was gathered to his fathers before my mother's death, and his widow and her two bairns got all. Poor Sarah Braidfute!—at the age of eighteen she made a stolen marriage with a private soldier from the

castle, and had her father's door shut upon her from that time. It was said—I hope without truth—that the stepmother herself had secretly connived at the intimacy with a view to this result.

I met Sarah in the street some years ago, and would have passed her by as a stranger, she was so altered; but she recognised and stopped me. She was a faded, shabbily-dressed, care-worn woman, and the sight of me, and the thought of old times, made her cry piteously. Her husband's regiment had just come to Edinburgh, and she had presented herself at her former home, hoping that her stepmother might give her some little help, but had got a rough denial. Poor thing! I took her home to Nelly, and we did what we could for her and her bairns. She is now abroad, but I hear from her statedly.

I have been looking over what I have written, and I fear that the latter part of it may create impression on the reader's mind that I am an unhappy, hermit kind of man; and I confess this troubles me. I live, indeed, apart from the world—my usual walks are in its by-paths and

solitary places—yet have I my own simple pleasures and little circle of friends. With them I keep up an interchange of humble hospitalities suited to our means. And though I possess no ties of blood except so remote as scarcely to be countable, Adam Bowman is my brother in spirit, his wife is my sister, and their children are my children. I am interested in all their joys and sorrows; and “Uncle Matthew,” as they call me, is as free of the parlour fireside at the Culdees as the old house-dog himself. And is not my own nameson, dedicated like me in his youth to the holy ministry, (may his career be a higher and more useful one than mine!) an inmate of my house, my winter companion, while he walks the same course of study that I formerly did?

No, I am not an unhappy man. I have had my trials, but I have had my blessings also. “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” I have seen the grave close over all my nearest and dearest: but what shall separate me from the love of Christ? No, not even death itself. There is a peace which

the world cannot give, and, thank God, which the world cannot take away ; and He has given it to me.

And I have my sphere of labour, I may call myself a city missionary—deputed by no sect or congregation of men, however, but by my Master Himself, who commanded me in these words, addressed to His disciples through all the ages, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to all creatures.” And with these credentials I go forth, and in my feeble way try to do a little for Him among my poorer and more ignorant fellow-men.

I am getting on in my pilgrimage—being this day sixty years old. Nelly and I have daikered on together since my mother’s death, and will till death takes one or other of us. May I be the one ! My house is set in order : Nelly is comfortably provided for, for her life ; and poor Sarah Braidfute and Adam Bowman’s family are my heirs.

I generally am to be met daily in the streets and wynds of the old town ; but occasionally I wander far out into the country to enjoy God’s

pure air and blessed sunshine among the quiet fields and hills. To-morrow we propose to lock the door and take our summer journey—Nelly to visit her friends near “lone St. Mary’s loch,” and I to occupy the little green-stained room which is called mine at the Culdees farm.

So farewell, reader, whoever thou art, says thy friend,

MATTHEW MORRISON.

6.6







